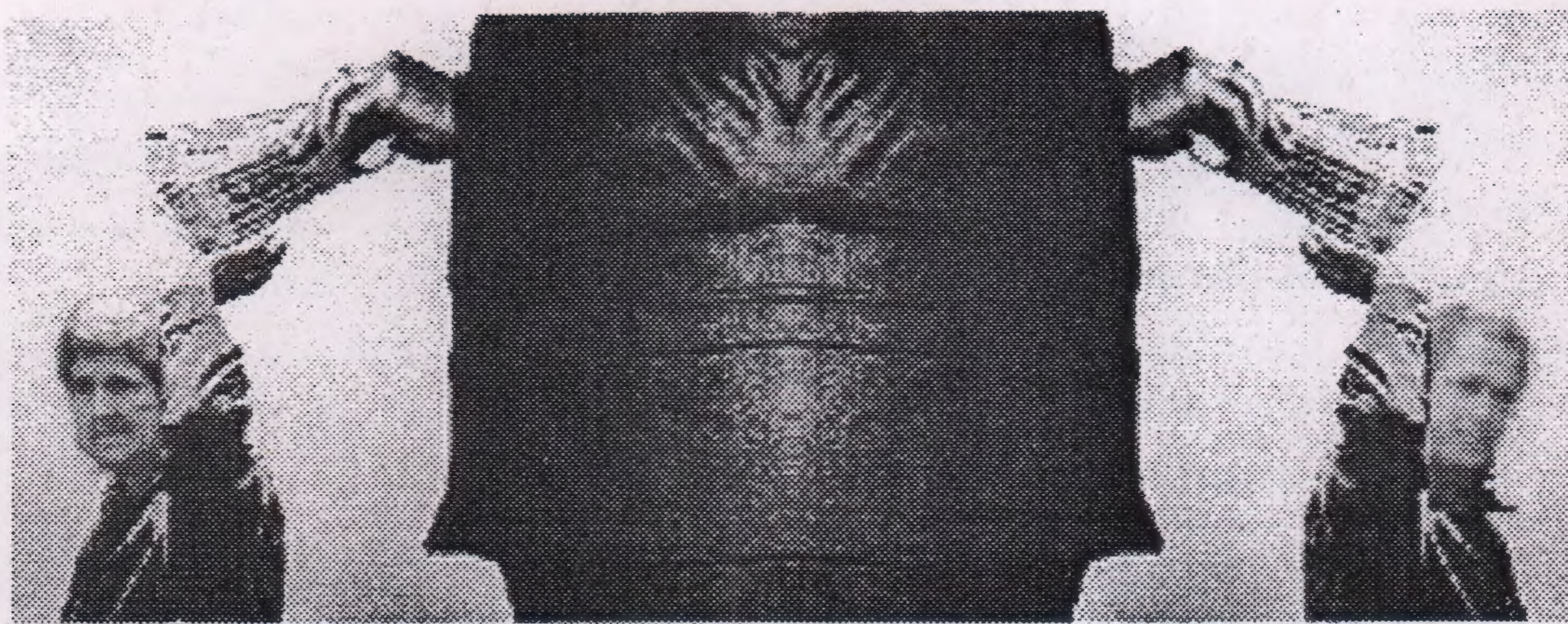


Revolutionary Perspectives 34

Elections —



Democratic Mask for Capital's Dictatorship

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**US Election • Iraq • Middle East • China
Ukraine • 1905 Russian Revolution
German Unemployment • IBRP in Germany
Tsunami**

Revolutionary Perspectives

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Editorial

US, Oil and Iran

At his inauguration Bush indicated that the US would continue to assert its interests by military force all round the world. In fact, he appeared to broaden the range of countries the US might attack by suggesting the war was now a war against tyranny rather than terror. Various outposts of tyranny have been identified and, not surprisingly, Iran is top of the list. Iran, of course, is a major oil producer currently producing about four million barrels daily with reserves of 90 billion barrels. These reserves are only 20% less than those of Iraq, and make it a very significant source of future oil. It is also geographically a key piece of the jigsaw of states between the Red Sea and the Caspian. With a US-controlled government in Iran, oil from the Caspian basin could be brought out via Iran to the Gulf. It therefore comes as no surprise to be told that US commandos are already operating in Iran, selecting targets for aerial bombardment and routes of attack.

The US case against Iran is even more threadbare than that against Iraq. Iran's enrichment of uranium, which is the present pretext for regime change in Iran, is actually its legitimate right and does not violate any treaty. The aggressive preparations which the US is now undertaking indicate how little the US is now prepared to bother with the so-called international law. A US attack on Iran would be a setback for the EU and a disaster for the UK. French, German and British ambassadors have been shuttling to and fro between European capitals and Tehran trying to convince the Iranians to avoid provoking the US by giving up uranium enrichment. Behind this lies the European determination to ensure their own oil supplies and oil contracts with Tehran and to prevent the US overturning these by force, as happened in Iraq. The British foreign secretary has even said, perhaps prematurely, that the UK would not support an invasion of Iran. Japan and China would also be significant losers if the US were to overthrow the Tehran regime and rip up existing oil contracts. The search for alternative supplies has led the Japanese, who at present get

85% of their oil from the Middle East, to recently agree with Russia to build a pipeline from the Siberian fields to the Pacific at Nakhodha, near Vladivostok.

The reasons why the US is so determined to dominate the Middle Eastern oil fields are discussed in the articles on the US election and Iraq in this issue. The oil industry is the largest global industry and economic dependence on oil is increasing, not decreasing. In the next 25 years, demand for oil will rise by 50% to 120 million barrels daily, and control of this resource will give the capitalists controlling it obvious advantages. As explained in the texts which follow the struggle to control oil resources is a reflection of deeper problems in the capitalist system of production itself. These are derived from the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the rate of capital accumulation to slow down. These problems are expressed in the financial sphere. It is significant, for example, that monetary reserves held by governments today are 9% of global GDP whereas in the early '70's they were only 2% of GDP. This is because there are fewer profitable fields for investment today and governments are prepared to speculate with cash. 67% of global reserves are held in dollars, which are, of course, backed by nothing and whose value is controlled by the US. Movements in the dollar's value are becoming ever more crucial to the world economy. The instability in the financial sphere reflects the continual problems in the sphere of production, and it is this which lies behind the barbaric wars which US imperialism is launching in the Middle East.

British troops and class society

The crimes committed in Iraq have not been limited to the US forces as previously maintained by our leaders. Now it is our "own" soldiers who are in the dock for abusing Iraqis and violating conventions of war. As in the case of the Abu Ghraib atrocities, it is the lowest ranks who are having to take all the blame, though they were clearly carrying out orders from above. As always, when our leaders want

someone to carry out their killing they praise "our" troops to the skies and every year solemnly lay wreaths on the cenotaph at armistice day. However, the soldiers who do the dirty work are recruited from the working class from areas where capitalism offers them the most dismal future, and in reality our rulers hold them in contempt. They are quite happy to let them take the blame when the crimes they have been ordered to commit come to light. When soldiers become incapable of fighting, from illness directly caused by the wars, e.g. Gulf War Syndrome, Post Traumatic Shock Stress Disorder, etc., the capitalist class does everything it can to prove that such illnesses do not exist so they can avoid having to spend any money looking after these soldiers. Soldiers leaving the forces often cannot be reintegrated into work in the economy and sink to the lowest levels where our rulers disown them. The governments own figures show that at any time there are at least 20 000 ex-servicemen sleeping rough and 5000 in prison. These figures are only an illustration of the more general problems which affect capitalist society. There are now 100 000 homeless families in Britain mostly from the working class. A recent report by the London School of Economics for the Sutton Trust concludes that class divisions today are worse than they were in the '50's. People born in the '50's were significantly more likely to be able to escape their parents' class, as defined by the government, than those born in the '70's. Because of capitalism's problems of profitability the wages and conditions of the working class are under a steady and unrelenting attack. The real cause of this, and the wars and atrocities, is the capitalist system itself. It stands in the dock of history.

US Election

Four More Years of the Same

By giving the Bush team a second term, the US ruling class has confirmed its general support for the strategy followed in the previous four years. This shows, as we have argued previously, that this strategy was not an aberration caused by the hijacking of the presidency by neo-conservative madmen but was consistent with the needs of US capitalism. The other candidate, Kerry, supported Bush on key policy issues and restricted his criticism to the incompetence of the Bush team in carrying out these policies. As our comrades in *Battaglia Comunista* noted, one really needed a Diogenes' lamp to find the difference between Bush and Kerry. This confirms that the new unilateral thrust of US imperialism, which became apparent after 11th September 2001, is a strategy supported by the US bourgeois class as a whole. It will not,

therefore, be reversed and the rivals of the US will have to live with the consequences.

For the EU this means the Atlantic gulf, which now separates the US and the central EU powers, will become wider and the disputes will become more dangerous. For the UK the coming period will inevitably make its mid Atlantic position more difficult to maintain. The luxury of keeping a foot in both camps will not be sustainable.

The election

Elections under capitalism are always gigantic frauds. They allow the ruling class to disguise their dictatorship over society, which results from their position as the dominant economic class, and instead present it as the people's will. In reality, it is the power centres

of capital who determine the results of elections. In the US elections the cost of being elected to the senate stands at more than \$5 million and the cost of being elected to the presidency \$500 million. Clearly the working class can have no influence on this process which depends on the large concentrations of industrial and financial capital. Bush won the election because he was the representative of the military industrial complex and the oil and financial sectors. These groups represent the

most important sectors of US capitalism — an axis about which the economy revolves. Kerry, although also receiving donations from these sectors, only received 20% of the donations given to Bush.

Not surprisingly, it is these sectors which have done so well under the first Bush presidency. Many of the military producers have seen their share price take off and their profits soar. Lockheed Martin is one such company. Its profits for 2004 were \$307mn, an increase of 41% on 2003, and its share price has quadrupled. Northrup Grumman and General Electric are other companies having similar results. These massive profits are, of course, based on the \$420bn defence budget. Similarly the oil companies have seen a massive increase in profits. The median increase in profits since September 2001 has been 100%. This increase is largely the result of the increase in the price of oil which the wars in the Middle East have brought about. For these sectors the argument to keep Bush in power was irresistible.

However, the Bush strategy of using the military to seize raw materials and regions of the world addresses the deeper problems of US capitalism and it is this which makes the US capitalist class as a whole support Bush.

Declining profitability of US capital

US capital is suffering, like capital worldwide, from the tendency of profit rates to fall. The declining profitability of industrial capital has forced large sections of US industry to go into bankruptcy or to relocate overseas. Relocation overseas is part of the process of export of capital to areas where labour power is cheaper, such as South East Asia and China¹. At present US production is only 75% of domestic demand and the difference is made up by imports. The massive trade deficit resulting from this, which now stands at \$630bn or 6% of the GDP, is a reflection of the declining profitability of US capital. In addition, the US has a budget deficit of the same

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order — roughly 5% of the GDP. To fund these deficits the US has to attract capital from abroad to the tune of \$2.6bn daily, which is equivalent to approximately 80% of the world's net savings. This process is becoming ever more difficult as the international bourgeoisie start to worry about the value of the dollar. Since 2001, there has been a net outflow of foreign direct investment and portfolio capital from the US, but this has been compensated for by inflows of money from foreign governments. In the 2.5 years between 2002 and mid 2004 foreign governments financed \$564bn of current account deficit.

The flow of funds from foreign governments to the US is the biggest (albeit unofficial) aid programme in history.²

If this flow of capital were to stop US interest rates would have to rise to double digits triggering massive problems in the US itself, where personal debt is now equal to 85% of the GDP, and internationally where global recession would be likely to occur. The condition for the survival of the US as the world's major economy is maintaining this flow of capital until profitability can be restored. As we have argued with respect to the invasion of Iraq³, the maintenance of the role of the dollar as the currency of world trade and control of raw materials are key factors in maintaining the economic position of the US. The policies of invading Afghanistan, Iraq, and possibly Iran and Saudi Arabia in the future, are the imperialist strategies which express the overall interests of US capitalism. Already the Bush team has made it clear that these policies will be continued. At his inauguration Bush spoke of the need to continue to preserve US "freedom" by establishing "freedom" and ending "tyranny" abroad. He means, of course, the extension of US domination worldwide of which the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are examples. The message is that more such wars are necessary. The vice president Cheney set the scene for the new term by saying he was not happy about Iran. The last country he said that about was Iraq. At her confirmation hearings the new secretary of state Condoleezza Rice announced that the old axis of evil, as defined by Bush in 2001, which has now been reduced from three states to two by the invasion of Iraq, had metamorphosed itself into six states, which were now baptised as

the "outposts of tyranny." Since Bush pledged to combat "tyranny" these countries, namely, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Burma, Belarus and Zimbabwe are now in the firing line. The war on "terror" is being changed into the war on "tyranny."

For the US bourgeoisie the attack on the twin towers was a godsend, it came like manna from heaven. This attack allowed them to manufacture an external enemy and an external threat. It was an enemy which could not be properly defined, which had a shadowy existence and changed its shape and method of operation. It existed in many countries, even in the US itself. This provided the perfect camouflage behind which the tanks and missiles of US imperialism could be moved into position and strike in one country after another. Internally it could be used to justify massive increases in military spending and cuts in that part of state spending which benefits the working class, such as health care, pensions, etc. Externally, the US bourgeoisie used this threat to justify trampling on international law and Geneva Conventions on war, while internally civil freedoms and rights could be abolished. For US workers, industrial or better paid jobs are disappearing. 1.6 million jobs were lost in the last quarter of 2004. Service jobs which replace some of these jobs are low paid or part-time and today US wages are on average at the levels of the early '70's. These declining conditions and pay are brushed aside by the ideology of the ruling class which declares it is necessary to make sacrifices and unite for the prosecution of this unending war. The war on terror has replaced the Cold War as the ideology for mobilising the US working class behind the banners of US imperialism and a new phase of foreign wars and occupations.

Foreign wars

As we have shown above the US thrust into the Middle East springs from its economic problems but the reasons for it have been hidden behind a smokescreen of lies about the war on "Terror." While this ideology may be useful for deceiving the US population, it no longer fools the US's rivals who understand the US's actions as a direct threat to their interests. The attack on Iraq could not possibly be justified under the banner of the war on terror and the latest announcement of a war

on tyranny is so vague that it enables the US to attack any country it wishes. The re-election of Bush means that the differences between the US and the EU will sharpen and US actions will be more consistently undermined by the central countries in the EU. These countries, of course, do not wish to see the US controlling vital raw materials and forcing them to give up their interests. Nor do they wish to see the dollar continuing in its role as the global currency of trade.

The US is, however, marshalling a coalition of those who have an interest in maintaining the present ordering of world power and the present role of the dollar. Against this coalition stand large factions of the international bourgeoisie of the producer countries and Europe whose interest is in supplanting the present order and undermining the supremacy of the dollar. These two factions are set to be drawn into sharper conflict in the years ahead. The coming period will see more war and devastation. As our comrades of *Battaglia Comunista* have written,

All say they are fighting for God and freedom but in reality the contest is only for profits and the domination of the world. Perhaps it is for this reason that on the dollar is written "In God we trust." The war which is at present in progress will end only when the last oil well has been assigned to the victors. In the meantime, however, violence, hunger and disease will spread in the name of Islam and the values of the West.⁴

CP

Notes

1 See "China – Growing Economy, Growing Tensions", in this edition

2 *Financial Times*, 1st December 2004, "America is switching to a weak dollar policy"

3 See "Iraq War, Elections, and Class Struggle" in this edition

4 *Prometeo* No. 10, December 2004, "La nuova Guerra dei trenta anni ovvero del petrolio"

Iraq

War, Elections and Class Struggle

Destruction and Chaos

As Iraq prepares for the famous January election the country remains in a state of chaos. The killings and bombings are now so frequent that the bourgeois press often does not bother to report them. The numbers killed each week are now numbered in hundreds, and where open warfare breaks out as in Falluja, they are numbered in thousands. The head of Iraq's intelligence service general Shahwani estimates that there are now 200 000 active supporters of the insurgency and that the number of hardcore fighters is approximately 40 000. This gives the lie to the frequent US claims that the back of the insurgency has been broken and that only small numbers of fighters remain and these have little support. Savage repression by the US and destruction of cities where the resistance draws its support have failed to stop the insurgency. The destruction of Falluja, which was before the US assault a city of 300 000 inhabitants, and where today only 8500 live, has spread the fighting to the cities where the inhabitants fled and drawn more recruits into the resistance. As Blair's ex-ambassador to the US government in Baghdad, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, observed:

The insurgency is ineradicable by US and foreign troops alone. It depends on the Iraqis. We have lost primary control.¹

The fact that the situation is not being brought under control was recognised by the Allawi regime when they extended the state of emergency in January.

In fact the invasion, which according to the latest Bush/Blair explanation, was supposed to bring welfare and democracy to Iraq has brought massive suffering and the destruction of the fabric of society. Basic services such as water, sewage, electricity, transport and health are all significantly worse than before the invasion. Rivers are polluted with sewage and the land with the debris of war, including tonnes of depleted uranium. Half the schools

have been destroyed by bombing and unemployment, which before the war was 30%, is now between 60 and 75%. The US administration which ran Iraq until last July squandered approximately \$20bn of Iraq's own funds, money derived from oil sales and amounts in the oil for food account and other previously blocked accounts which they took over. In the last few weeks of the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) existence it got rid of some \$2bn of this money!² The notorious payments to the backers of the Bush junta, such as Halliburton, Bechtel and the rest of them amount to little more than looting, the capitalist modern day equivalent of that carried out by the Fourth Crusade. It is now admitted that the CPA gave 73% of all contracts over \$5million to cronies without competitive tender or any records being kept. Where competitive tenders were demanded the work was given to US contractors even where their price was 100 times more than local Iraqi contractors.³ Many of these contracts, however, cannot be carried out because of the insurgency. Even the mouthpiece of British financial capital, the *Financial Times*, which supported the invasion, now pronounces the occupation as a "catastrophe."

The country continues on a path to Balkanisation and civil war. It is under these conditions that the famous election is to be held. Can the election change anything?

The famous election

If the election were a real threat to US ambitions in Iraq it would not be held. The only reason it is being held is because the US intends to use it to strengthen its position in the country and the region as a whole. In general, it is the real relations of power which will determine political outcomes no matter in what form these outcomes are presented. While the US has its army controlling the country and its puppets running the government, there is no way that this election will produce a result which opposes US interests. It is simply ridiculous to talk of free or

fair elections under these circumstances. How precisely the US will deal with the situation after the elections is not yet clear. It depends on the precise results of the election; however, it is clear that they are already considering a number of options.

The election is to choose a 275-member national assembly and 18 provincial assemblies. The national assembly is supposed to draft the new constitution which is supposed to lead to further elections next December and the installation of sovereign government by the end of the year. The elections are being conducted on the basis of proportional representation. The country is treated as one big constituency and each party prepares a list of candidates from which assembly members are chosen in proportion to the votes cast for the party. The organisation of parties and lists of candidates has been largely on ethnic or religious lines, though certain secular parties, such as the Stalinist Communist Party, are standing. The most serious attempts at organisation have been made by the Kurds and the Shias, who think they have the most to gain from the election. The majority of the Sunni parties are, however, boycotting the election while insurgents are opposing it with a campaign of violence. This campaign is so savage that electoral lists cannot be published for fear of assassination of candidates, no electioneering can be carried out and voters dare not register. The latest proposal from the Interim administration is that registration and voting should take place at the same time. The violence is such that several members of the Interim Administration have called for the postponement of the election. The US would not consider this and it is, of course, the US which makes such decisions.

It is clear that the election will be a farce. If the Sunnis do not participate, which is a virtual certainty, they will be assigned no seats and be without a voice in drafting the constitution and the whole exercise is likely to collapse. This in turn will bring the unitary nature

of the Iraqi state into question, a further step on the road to Balkanisation and civil war. A group of Sunni clerics, the Association of Muslim Scholars, approached the US embassy and offered to participate in the election if the US set a definite timetable for the withdrawal of its forces. The US rejected this offer. From this it is obvious that the US has no intention of quitting Iraq until it has achieved what it came for.

The election will almost certainly lead to a Shia dominated assembly. It is, however, a measure of the naiveté of the Shia clerics that they imagine their control of the assembly will get the US out of the country and keep its hands off the country's oil. While it is true that the US does not want a Shia dominated assembly, particularly one friendly to Iran, and it is true that the US has consistently opposed elections time and again since the invasion for this very reason, nonetheless the holding of elections will be a step forward for the US. The lie that the invasion was to establish Iraqi democracy is now part of the US explanation for the war and the election will be presented as a vindication of this. The seriousness with which the Shia clerics have urged their flock to participate has been an advantage for the US already. Not only has it given credence to the election, it has ended the Shia insurrection of Moqtada Al Sadr and the Mehdi army. The army has been transformed from a fighting force to a few names on a voting list. This left the US forces with a free hand to deal with Falluja. The fact that the election has been held, no matter how flawed or unfair it might be, will be a great boost for the US. The election will mark the end of one chapter of the history of the US occupation and the opening of another.

While the present situation is full of difficulties for the US, its military power will prevent the political initiative passing into the hands of those who oppose its interests. As we have seen in the case of the famous UN resolution which was supposed to legalise the invasion, when US imperialism finds its attempts to act within the law are blocked it acts outside the law. It is therefore likely the US will be more brazen in manipulating the political process after the election. In achieving its aims it is quite capable of turning things which at present appear as setbacks to its advantage. For example, the abstention of the majority of the

Sunni electorate and the flawed election could be used as the pretext for intervention in the assembly. The US could, for example, appoint Sunni delegates to the council from its own list of favourite exiles. It could use the pretext of the insurgency for appointing its own prime minister until the state of emergency ended. The threat of civil war could be used to justify the refusal to withdraw US troops, etc., etc. While there are sections of Iraqi society, such as the Shias and the Kurds, who feel they will gain from the US presence these groups will be manipulated to shore up the US position. The precise tactics the US will use to camouflage the prosecution of its ambitions cannot be predicted, but it is clear that the election will be presented as a great step forward. One way or another the US will pursue its objectives in invading Iraq, objectives which it has still to achieve.

US Ambitions

The reasons given for the invasion have all been shown to be lies. At the time of writing the US has quietly announced that there never were any weapons of mass destruction or weapons programmes in Iraq and they have given up all attempts to find them. As we have argued many times the real reasons for the invasion were material ones connected to oil.⁴ As the US ambassador to Italy declared,

*The person who thinks that the United States is prepared to lose the oil of the Middle East is someone who does not know America or Americans.*⁵

This war is only an episode in a more general thrust of US imperialism which is intended to subdue its rivals and cement its dominance of the world, a dominance which began in the new period which followed the collapse of the Russian bloc. The US is aiming at asserting its hegemony over the entire oil-producing region of the Middle East from the Red Sea to the Caspian. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are steps in this strategy. Far from contemplating withdrawal from Iraq the US is now planning to attack and possibly invade Iran to give it control of Iranian oil also. This has recently been confirmed in the bourgeois press.⁶ Although the US tries to conceal the object of these moves behind the smokescreen of the "war on terror", it cannot disguise the fact that the ultimate targets of US aggression are

its rivals, the EU, Japan, China and Russia. The immediate ambitions are to secure its oil supplies for the next two decades and to control the production and price of oil. In particular, it wishes to determine the price which its rivals have to pay for their oil, thereby controlling the profitability of their economies and undermining their competitiveness with the US. Further, the US intends to ensure that the massive amounts of surplus value which oil production nets worldwide are delivered to the US. A further and related objective of the US strategy is to shore up the position of the dollar as the fiat currency of world trade by ensuring that oil continues to be traded in dollars. The control of the world's currency which is no longer backed by anything, gives US capital an enormous advantage over its rivals. The US can increase the amount of currency in circulation as world trade grows or world commodities increase in price. This operation is a concealed tax on the rest of the world which brings the US hundreds of billions of dollars annually.

The actions of US imperialism, like other imperialisms, find their motive forces in the contradictions and pressures generated in the capitalist economy. For the US, the declining competitiveness of its industrial capital means that massive sections of industrial capital have either been destroyed or forced to relocate to areas of cheaper labour power. The US is not itself producing the surplus value it requires for capital accumulation and it is necessary for it to drain an ever increasing proportion of the surplus value produced worldwide into its economy. The control of raw materials and the maintenance of the position of the dollar are key elements in ensuring that this flow of surplus value to the US continues. The US crisis, which is at root one of profitability, expresses itself in the financial sphere as a crisis in the currency's value and the balance of payments.⁷ The fact that the US needs to use its military power, rather than its economic power, to achieve the continued dominance of the dollar shows both that its economic situation is becoming more critical and the economic threats it faces are becoming stronger. The lack of competitiveness of US capital is reflected in its massive trade deficit. This is being funded by dollars from those countries with trade surpluses. This is something the US could not sustain if the dollar were

backed by gold or if it were not the world's currency of international trade. The US is now facing a serious threat from the euro which is being held as a reserve currency in South East Asia, Russia and South America, and which threatens the dollar as a currency for trade in oil and other commodities. The actions of the US in the Middle East are thus an expression of the needs of US capitalism.

The danger for the US is that its aggression in the area could produce wider instability which in the short term makes the US economic position much worse. The chaos in Iraq could prompt local bourgeois factions in Kurdistan or the Shia south to attempt to set up independent states. This in turn could precipitate a wider struggle involving Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, now that the US has embarked on the strategy of installing pro-US regimes throughout the Middle East it is extremely difficult for it to retreat without suffering a great loss of influence in the region.

Local bourgeois resistance and class struggle

While local factions of the Iraqi bourgeoisie in the Kurdish or Shiite regions have been prepared to cooperate or play a waiting game with the US invaders, others have not. In particular the political forces of the Sunni bourgeoisie and those of pan-Arab radical Islam oppose the US and now appear to be the backbone of the resistance to the occupation. As we have pointed out in previous texts, this resistance movement is virulently anti-working class, and the developments of the last few months provide graphic confirmation of this.

Despite the social breakdown and massive unemployment which exists in the country there remains a high level of class struggle which the US administration (CPA) and the present Interim Authority has had to confront. The CPA attempted to bring this struggle under control by legalising a single trade union federation, the Iraqi Free Trade Union (IFTU). This union was recognised as the sole legal federation of unions in Iraq by the CPA in January 2004. It was allowed to organise and given offices in Baghdad. This union is dominated by the Stalinist Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) which supports the Allawi regime and itself

has a minister in this government. According to its own figures, the IFTU now includes 12 unions and has 200 000 members. The role the US and the Interim Authority see for the IFTU was illustrated at a recent strike by workers at the "Petrochemicals and Plastics Industry" in Baghdad. Here the union threatened striking workers with the sack or gaol on the grounds that resolutions passed by the Allawi regime made their action illegal. They forced workers to join the IFTU and got the management to deduct union dues from their wages. Despite the fact that the government has made other unions illegal, other union groupings have emerged, in particular the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI) and the Union of Unemployed in Iraq (UII), in which the Worker Communist Party of Iraq is the dominant political force. Strikes and protests over pay and conditions, outside of the IFTU, have been taking place throughout Iraq in the petrochemicals, power generation, textile and services sectors. Basic working class demands, over pay and conditions have been put forward. These demands such as linking wages to inflation, abolition of compulsory overtime, ending of punishment by deductions from wages, ending of victimisation by managers, free assembly, etc., have an all too familiar ring and are similar to those put forward by the striking workers of St Petersburg in 1905, whose petition to the Tsar we publish in this edition. They illustrate how the essential injustices of capitalism are fundamentally unchanged from 100 years ago. Also, of course, the reaction of the bourgeois class to the demands of the workers is virtually unchanged. Although, as mentioned above, trade unions are now used worldwide to control the class struggle, when this fails open violence, similar to that used by the Cossacks on bloody Sunday is used. In a strike in the textiles industry in the town of Kut, for example, the management cooperating with the Allawi regime brought in National Guards and broke the strike by shooting four workers. It is not only the US and the Interim government which attacks and murders workers, it is also the resistance. Workers have been kidnapped and murdered by the insurgents and unions have been attacked. Two train drivers and four railway workers were kidnapped and killed in November and December. 18 workers, some as young as 14, were stopped and executed as

they travelled from Baghdad to Mosul where they were due to work on a US base, and in January the international secretary of the IFTU was murdered, apparently by the resistance. These events illustrate once more the completely anti working class nature of the resistance.

The European left wing groups from the Trotskyists to sections of the anarchists are now supporting the Iraqi resistance and actually condemning workers who do not support this resistance. The political argument they advance is that workers should side with the national bourgeoisie, however reactionary that might be, to defeat the greater enemy which is US imperialism. After the US is driven out and the national bourgeoisie and the Islamic clergy have taken power, so the argument goes, the local class struggle can resume and workers can proceed with the social revolution. As we have pointed out previously, these arguments are the well oiled politics of the counter revolution and are a recipe for defeat. The organisations which put forward these arguments from the Respect Coalition to the SWP reveal the bourgeois nature of their politics. As we have stated previously,

Once the Iraqi bourgeoisie has been restored to power it would without doubt proceed to crush any workers who dared to challenge it.⁸

An anti-capitalist struggle can only begin with a complete rupture with bourgeois politics and all factions of the bourgeois class. In the present difficult situation the only way forward for the Iraqi working class is to continue its autonomous class struggle against all factions of the bourgeoisie. Workers at the "Petrochemicals and Plastics Industry" in Baghdad, mentioned above, showed that this is possible by continuing their strike until they won their demands. We call on Iraqi workers to continue their struggles against all sections of the Iraqi and US bourgeoisie and ignore the fraudulent election which is being foisted on them. They should make their slogan: no war but the class war.

CP

Notes

1 Quoted by BBC, 6th January 2005, Blistering attacks threaten Iraqi election

Continued opposite

New Palestinian President, Old Problems Remain

A new dawn?

The recent election of the new President of the Palestine Authority (PA), Mahmoud Abbas, has been met with near universal support from the world bourgeoisie, particularly in the west. Even arch-enemy of the Palestinian cause, Ariel Sharon, telephoned Abbas to congratulate him on his victory. It is almost as though the whole world has bought the Israeli line that whilst peace was impossible with Arafat the terrorist at the helm of the PA, the election of a new leader who has been critical of the Intifada will pave the way for a harmonious and historic resolution of the Israel/Palestine question. In other words Israel has won the argument that it is the attitude of the Palestinians rather than Israeli intransigence that is the prime obstacle to a settlement.

Now Abbas has to turn around Arafat's chaotic, despotic, corrupt and effectively moribund regime. On top of that, as a pre-requisite for any deal with Israel, he has to reign in the Islamic militants such as Hamas, and even the militants of the al Aqsa Martyrs brigades which are part of his own Fatah movement. This is a pretty tall order for any politician, particularly

one who sits atop a "state" that barely exists. Abbas's "landslide" election victory does not represent a popular mandate taking into account the substantial support for Hamas who did not take part in the elections.

Divisions in the Palestinian bourgeoisie

There remains much opposition to Abbas and the old guard of the PLO leadership. In fact, the Palestinian movement has been in disarray since 1987, when Arafat declared he was prepared to recognise the state of Israel and thereby reversed the founding principles of the movement. With the Oslo Accords, the leadership accepted the possibility of a Palestinian state as set out under resolution 181, thereby renouncing the possibility of a state on all of the Palestinian territory. Now, the Road Map speaks of the exclusion of some settlements and the more economically important areas of the West Bank. The "Rejection Front" has struggled to prevent Arafat selling out the interests of the Palestinian bourgeoisie. The battle between Hamas and Al Fatah for the leadership of the Palestinian world arose in the first *intifada* of 1987. From this time,

Hamas gnawed away at the credibility of the PLO and questioned how much it really represented Palestinian aspirations. It did this by proposing that the Palestinian finances were reorganised without corruption and were made available for the armed struggle. It also created a minimum of social assistance in the refugee camps and areas of desperation. It transformed the mosques into places of charity and recruitment. On the death of Arafat, Hamas presented its hand, a hand now made stronger by the alliance with radical groups such as Jihad and Tanzim. It wanted power and political legitimacy. Its withdrawal from the elections to leave Abbas a free run is therefore something of a tactical retreat. All the reasons for its opposition to the PLO old guard remain.

A temporary truce?

Abbas is supposed to be an accomplished negotiator but he has limited room for manoeuvre. The militants have pledged to give the new President some breathing space provided that he deals with the rampant corruption within the PA. However as a member of the Arafat old guard, it is questionable whether Abbas has either the will or the ability to tackle the corruption issue. Moreover, less than a week into the new presidency, Islamic militants launched a suicide attack on a Gaza checkpoint killing six Israelis. In response, Sharon has suspended contact with Abbas under the old familiar pretext that members of the Palestinian security services were involved in the attack. This is intended to put further pressure on Abbas to bring the militants to heel. If he fails, the Israelis have made it clear that military reprisals for any future attacks will follow. Things are looking grim already.

Now given that, at least on the face of it, the Israelis are saying that it can do business with Abbas, why don't they now get round the table and hammer out a reasonable settlement? The

Iraq: War, Elections and Class Struggle

Continued from opposite page

Greenstock was previously UK ambassador to the UN where he helped to draft resolution 1441. He famously stated that this resolution would not automatically lead to war even if Iraq was in breach of part of it. After the invasion Blair gave him the top job in Baghdad.

2 See *Financial Times*, 10th December 2004

3 See *Guardian*, 3rd December 2004. The newspaper reports that Bechtel, who were given sole charge of rehabilitating and privatising the railways, received offers to reconstruct a bombed bridge. An Iraqi contractor quoted \$300 000 and a US contractor quoted \$30 000 000. The work was given to the US contractor.

4 See *Revolutionary Perspectives* 30, "US Imperialism Bugged Down on the Road to Eldorado" and *Revolutionary Perspectives* 32, "Iraqi Quagmire. US Imperialism Flounders."

5 Quoted in *Prometeo* 10, December 2004, "La nuova Guerra dei trenta anni ovvero del petrolio." For Bocca "The mistakes of Hitler and those of Bush"

6 See report in *New Yorker* magazine 17th January 2005, Seymour Hersh

7 This is considered in more detail in the article on the US election in this edition. See "US Election – Four More Years of the Same"

8 See *Revolutionary Perspectives* 32, "Iraqi Quagmire. US Imperialism Flounders."

answer is that the Israeli bourgeoisie is not in the business of reasonable settlements and all the historical indicators suggest that only almost total capitulation on the part of the Palestinians will do. We need to go back to July 2000 which saw the end of the Oslo accords. At Camp David, the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered the Palestinians a deal which would have returned only a portion of the occupied territories and retained most of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Palestinian claims for a right of return for the refugees and for East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state were also rejected out of hand. Not surprisingly, Arafat was not prepared to sign, and the second *Intifada* commenced. Five years on, there is no indication whatsoever that Israel is prepared to offer any more favourable terms, indeed any deal that may be offered now is likely to be less favourable from a Palestinian nationalist perspective. Sharon has made it clear that there is no question of the whole of the occupied territories being returned to the Palestinians. The proposed unilateral withdrawal from Gaza is an integral part of this policy. This "concession" to the Palestinian Authority allows Israel to jettison an expensive and unnecessary occupation in an area of few Jewish settlements in order to consolidate its control over the far more strategically and economically significant West Bank.

Abbas represents the moderate wing of the Palestinian bourgeoisie for whom any state is better than no state, as such a state, will provide more opportunity to accumulate wealth and exploit the working class than the current economically suffocating occupation. Whether or not Abbas is prepared to enter into negotiations on Israel's terms (i.e. the only terms available) depends upon whether or not he has the will or the means to confront militarily the militant wing of the Palestinian bourgeoisie. To do so, which in all probability would require either overt or covert collaboration with the Israeli army would be a huge political gamble which could lead to civil war within the territories. On the other hand, to maintain the stalemate is likely to strengthen the hand of the militants who are waiting in the wings to move in, in the event of the Abbas leadership falling into disarray.

Class struggle and Zionist divisions

Whilst Abbas's position is fragile, Sharon, although strong by comparison is not unassailable. It is questionable whether Israeli state can afford politically and economically to sustain the occupation indefinitely. Within the last few months, Sharon's government faced collapse over the Gaza withdrawal plan and has only remained in office by entering into a coalition with the opposition Labour Party, and offering a senior ministerial position to its leader Shimon Peres. Relatively speaking, it is more open to a compromise settlement with the Palestinians than before the coalition. A further and perhaps more significant constraint on Sharon is the escalating crisis in the Israeli economy, generated at least in part by the cost of the occupation and a collapse in economic activity (particularly in the large tourist sector) as a consequence of the *Intifada*.

The crisis in the economy resulted in the government implementing draconian public spending cuts directed primarily at public services. Thousands of public sector workers remained unpaid for several months, with the government demanding "economic reforms" entailing redundancy measures, as a condition for payment. This culminated in a general strike of 400 000 workers in September 2004. The strike called by the Histadut labour federation, lasted 24 hours before the National Labour Court ordered the Histadut to instruct its members to return to work. The court also ordered the government to pay back pay to municipal workers except for those working for local authorities which had refused to present "recovery plans" for cuts in services and further attacks on workers. Unemployment has risen substantially by 9% in the year from August 2003 to 2004. This equates to unemployment levels of 21% in many Arab localities with 10–15% being common in many Jewish communities. A further indicator of the growing crisis is the collapse in Jewish immigration to a 16 year low of 20 000. This compares with at least 50 000 Jews who returned to Russia between 2001 and 2003. These include a large number of skilled workers who have been unable to find anything but low paid work in Israel. The economic crisis and the need to head off class struggle is a priority for

the Israeli bourgeoisie which they have to factor into their ability to continue the occupation. The issue is how long workers will be prepared to sacrifice their own interests for the expansionist dreams of the Israeli state.

The other major constraint on Sharon is that attitude of the USA towards the Palestinian question. In the early part of last year, it appeared that Sharon had a totally free reign and was able to rip up the US "road map for peace" plan without opposition from the Bush regime. However, there are indications that the US may be beginning to change its position as Bush has recently announced his desire to see a Palestinian state by 2007. Of course this could be merely a meaningless propaganda statement designed to upstage European initiatives and to placate Arab opinion or, it could indicate the beginning of some sort of pressure on Sharon to conclude some kind of deal with the Palestinians. The British have also tried to get in on the act, with Blair announcing a Middle East peace conference in London in February. The Israelis have already announced that they will not attend as they know they do not need to take any notice of Tony Blair. The Palestinians may now not attend as they know that the US is the only serious broker in town, so the event, if it goes ahead, promises to be a total debacle.

Whether there can be any prospect of a peace deal will be determined by the machinations of international imperialism. Capitalism is only interested in a settlement to the extent that it facilitates the generation of profits through the exploitation of the working class. Whilst the situation of Palestinian workers is particularly desperate, the lesson from all national struggles in modern times is that the principle beneficiary is the bourgeoisie. A workers' solution requires unification of class struggle across national and religious boundaries to challenge the rule of capital.

PBD

China: Growing Economy, Growing Tensions

China, the new growth locomotive, is key to resolving the global trade imbalances and must play a central role in future.

The Economist, "The Risks Ahead For The World Economy", 9th September 2004

Over the past 20 years, and after a long period of isolation, China's role in the global economy has increased sharply. ... China is now the sixth-largest economy (at market exchange rates) and the fourth-largest trader in the world.

"China's Emergence and Its Impact on the Global Economy", IMF January 2004

... the future may be involved less with how the world is changing China than how China is changing the world.

Financial Times, Special Report on China, 7th December 2004

This consensus about China's importance to global capitalism shows the remarkable success of the policy of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" adopted by the CCP since the death of Mao. "Success", that is, in terms of meeting the challenge of opening up and restructuring China's backward state capitalist economy just as the advanced capitalist world was responding to falling profit rates with its own ruthless economic restructuring, including the intensified competition associated with globalisation. While the USSR stagnated under Brezhnev and its leadership remained paralysed during the post-Brezhnev political infighting, the death of Mao in 1976 had allowed the CCP — not without a power struggle — to adopt dramatic measures to respond to the economic crisis. In 1978 China, under Deng Xiaoping, was in the van of the privatisation and deregulation movement that became the economic orthodoxy of capitalism from the USA to the UK and eventually the USSR under Gorbachev. However, whilst *perestroika* was too little, too late to prevent the economic and political collapse of the USSR, Deng's programme of privatisation, investment in consumer goods and opening up trade, brought increased growth. While

Gorbachev's dream of a "common European home" and the investment which could have come with it failed to materialise, the CCP continued its economic deregulation programme: it put an end to government price controls, made massive cuts in state spending on fixed capital investment, and prepared the Chinese economy for a huge acceleration in foreign direct investment. Since joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2002, this process has further accelerated. Last year, China outstripped the USA to become the world's top destination for direct foreign investment (close on \$50bn). In terms of trade, both imports and exports are growing. China is currently the world's third largest importer and the fourth largest exporter of merchandise, hence all the acclamation about her role in boosting world growth. Japanese capital, for example, has benefited from Chinese demand for raw materials and equipment which, according to the *Financial Times*, "has reinvigorated moribund Japanese industries":

from shipbuilding and chemicals to steel and paper. ... Last year alone, shipments to China, now vying with the US as Japan's biggest trading partner, leapt a remarkable 33 per cent. As a result, companies have been investing in new plant and equipment. About half of Japan's growth, which has faltered in recent months, has come from capital investment.¹

China, the US and the WTO

Meanwhile, China's low-priced manufacturing exports are capturing the markets of her Asian and Latin American rivals as well as challenging the commitment of major members of the WTO to "free trade". In the United States, especially, there are regular calls from manufacturers for protectionist measures against Chinese goods which Washington is increasingly unwilling to resist. In November 2003, the US administration introduced special import quotas on Chinese clothing and textiles after imports had surged by

175% in the previous six months following the reduction of previous quotas. This hasn't silenced the likes of "The American Manufacturing Trade Action Coalition" or "The US International Mass Retail Association" who continue to demand more restrictions on imports from China, in the knowledge that,

In its agreement with the US to join the World Trade Organisation in 2000, China accepted an unprecedented provision that allowed the US to impose quotas unilaterally if it believed imports from China were disrupting the market and hurting domestic industries.²

As with international relations in general, the US reserves the right to put its own interests above any WTO agreement, adding fuel to the flames of populist protectionism. According to the protectionist lobby China is responsible for the loss of thousands of "American jobs". Indeed, during the first three years of China's membership of the WTO 300 000 textile jobs were lost in the US although much of China's gain has been at the expense of other exporting countries, especially from Latin America and the rest of Asia, rather than directly replacing US manufactures. However, it is unsurprising that protectionist campaigns in the United States should focus on China. The US is China's biggest market: over 20% of China's rapidly increasing exports go to America. These, in turn, account for a growing proportion of US manufacture imports. (Over 13% last year.) China has now superseded Mexico as the second largest exporter to the USA. (Canada is first.) This is bad news for Mexico since 90% of its exports go to the United States.³ Nor is the constant increase in cheap commodity imports entirely good news for the US since it only adds to the constantly record-breaking trade deficit.⁴ U.S. imports from China are now five times the value of exports and the \$68.5bn trade deficit with China is now the largest with any single country. Hence, the outrage over "unfair competition" and the cries for China to revalue its trading

currency (the renminbi) which is pegged to the declining US dollar. In general a declining currency means imported goods cost more. It is a way the US has found in the past to reduce its trade deficit. According to the US Economic Policy Institute,

A 30% fall in the dollar from 1985 to 1988 was required to reduce the real trade deficit from about 3% of GDP to 1% of GDP by 1989. ... Bringing down the 2004 deficit of 5.3% of GDP will require a much larger devaluation of the dollar. U.S. imports are now 51% larger than U.S. exports. Closing this gap will require a huge increase in domestic production of manufactured goods. Domestic output is now just 76.5% of domestic demand for manufacturers, substantially less than the 1987-1997 average of 90%. Domestic manufacturing output would have to increase by nearly 18% in order to raise output to its previous share of demand and produce enough domestically made goods to shrink the trade deficit.⁵

However, so long as the renminbi-dollar peg remains unchanged this will neither alter the trade deficit with China nor bring any advantage to US home manufacturers since the dollar price of commodities from China will remain the same. The same reasoning applies to the rest of the Asian Pacific economies (and others, such as Russia) who have either pegged their

currencies to the dollar or intervene in the foreign exchange markets to keep the dollar down in order that their exports remain competitive. During 2004 China resisted pressure for a currency revaluation. The US hasn't got the complete leverage over China it would like. The US treasury depends on China keeping up its purchases of treasury bonds, the sale of which are allowing the United States to continue spending well beyond its annual income. In effect the US is borrowing from its trading partners in order to pile up more debt.⁶ Paradoxically, therefore, this mounting pile of international dollar holdings only contributes to the declining exchange rate of the dollar against currencies, such as the euro, which are not pegged to the greenback. The editor of the *Financial Times*, who is particularly worried about what he calls the American debt trap, pointed out recently that:

... a 40% devaluation of the US dollar against the renminbi would cost the Chinese government up to \$200bn, as the domestic currency value of its dollar reserves fell. In a few years' time that cost might double. Even China's government might be embarrassed by losses on that scale.

It is the prospect of such losses, not arguments from the US Treasury Secretary about the damage to US industry, which will eventually persuade the Chinese authorities of the need to revalue the renminbi against the dollar. Meanwhile the FT has come up with another solution: China, along with the whole of "non-Japan Asia" should reverse roles with the US and become the debtor states. As he puts it:

Non-Japan Asia needs to become a large net importer of capital. Aggregate current account deficits of at least \$150bn

a year, in today's prices, would be very helpful.

This would certainly establish a more classical imperialist shape to China's relationship with the USA and the rest of the advanced capitalist world. It would also signal the end of any illusion of China's independent development and the writer does not explain why the CCP leadership should embark on a course that would lead to a deficit of 10% of GDP — 4% higher than the existing US current account deficit — and as likely as not their own downfall. What this is really advocating is that Chinese capital should borrow from Western banks and finance capitalists in order to develop its domestic market — enabling parasitic finance capital to get a financial rake-off without having to bother with the ins and outs of China's foreign business regulations or soiling its hands with the production process. Precisely what the supervisors of Chinese capitalism are out to avoid!

In reality, despite the surge in direct foreign investment in China since 1992, the country which accounts for about a quarter of the world's economic growth is not always the profitable honey-pot that is shouted about. For instance, although US affiliates inside China made an estimated \$8bn there in 2003, this was by no means their most lucrative investment zone. In the same year US firms made over \$14bn in Mexico, a country which has supposedly been surpassed by China; and almost \$9bn in the combined 'emerging' markets of Taiwan and South Korea which have a fraction of China's population (70 million). It is true that China's demand for raw materials and productive equipment has boosted profits for companies outside China, and in this way has contributed to the survival of positive growth rates for world capital; notably — as we have already mentioned — for Japanese capital, but also for the EU, particularly Germany. The fact remains, however, that the major significance to the world economy of a country where 60% of its GDP derives from trade is as a source of cheap manufactured commodities, based in turn on cheap labour power.

No Economic Miracle for the Working Class

It is now time to look at some of the consequences of China's "open door" policy for the domestic economy and,

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above all, for the working class in China. First, the economic miracle has to be put into perspective. With a population of 1.3bn and a working class comprising nigh on a quarter of capitalism's global labour force, China's GDP is about the same size as the UK's. (In 2003 China was ranked seventh in the world's GDP rankings league.) In *per capita* terms China can therefore now claim there is the equivalent of \$1,000 for each person. (This puts it at number 110 in the *per capita* league.) As with all *per capita* calculations, this is nonsense because GDP is never distributed evenly throughout a population. In fact, while Deng Xiaoping extolled the policy of "getting rich is glorious", income distribution in China became increasingly uneven. And so it continues. Last year about 200 million people, or 18% of the population, were officially acknowledged to be living on less than \$1 per day. At the same time the country's 100 richest businessmen saw a 25% increase in their incomes. (So China is a good contender in the most unfair country in the world league.) Underpinning this marvellous growth in GDP is the surplus value

produced by a workforce whose labour power, even in the more highly paid industries of the developed coastal strip, is four times cheaper than the labour power of Mexican workers. (Putting China's working class in the most exploited in the world league.) In the inland provinces wages are much lower, especially in the remaining state-owned enterprises which are "restructuring" and laying-off workers in order to compete.

For the 800 million or so people who still live on the land, the state's taxation policies and withdrawal of health and social security is making it increasingly difficult to survive. More and more are sub-letting the unviable family plots they lease from the state to a new class of big "agribusiness" landowners and joining the estimated 150 million "floating population" that gravitates around the coastal cities in search of work. For most people, however, the prospect of finding a job, is slim. According to the Chinese Ministry of Labour, between 1997-2000 restructuring and closure of "state owned enterprises" (SOE), led to a loss of 43 million jobs while new jobs in

the private sector amounted to 16.5 million. The shortfall is set to continue. Even according to optimistic official projections,

An article published by the Chinese news agency Xinhua on 2 February 2004 reported that the number of new job seekers entering the labour market in China will be around 15 million every year between 2003 and 2020. However, according to the article, only eight million jobs can be created annually, even if the economy maintains a growth rate of seven per cent.⁷

Nevertheless the working class in China is not so cowed as this situation might suggest. On the contrary the class struggle is seething in China. According to *The Guardian*, last October alone saw three million workers striking and protesting on the streets. There is not only growing resistance to further closures of state enterprises (which have been put on hold), but workers throughout the state and private sector are striking and protesting for demands as diverse as the payment of back wages.

Continued on page 15



Ukraine

A Case of Imperialist Confrontation

The orgasms of the Western press about the supposed transition to democracy of the Ukraine have been as obscene as they have been nauseating in their ecstasy. The so-called "Orange Revolution" has supposedly transformed the Ukraine from being a corrupt dictatorship to a pristine clean democracy overnight. Make no mistake. The regime of Kuchma was a corrupt post-Stalinist semi-dictatorship but this has been the case since 1990 and all criticism in the West has been until recently muted in the extreme. Suddenly, the Western press, fondly aping its various political masters, has realised that the Ukraine is not absolutely "free". This is an odd discovery since they have been telling us since the collapse of the USSR that Ukraine was a democracy (even if former Stalinist apparatchiks controlled it). So what has happened to change this perception? The truth is that the Ukrainian elections are another case of the forward advance of the NATO powers into the territory of the old Russian Empire. It is further proof that the collapse of the USSR was not the end of history but the beginning of a new phase of imperialist rivalry.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the same old Stalinist bureaucrats in the Ukraine re-invented themselves and Leonid Kuchma took over as the President. His regime was characterised by corruption, a cosying up to Moscow (under first Yeltsin and then Putin) and the occasional episode of police brutality. Unlike Russia though, the programme of selling off state assets did not mean the sale to a few mediocrity-level apparatchiks who suddenly became the new oligarchs (like Khordokovsky (imprisoned boss of Yukos) and Abramovitch (owner of Chelsea F.C.)), but was a more gradual process which saw the main state assets distributed over a wider number of oligarchs who each started up their own political party. According to Anders Aslund the economist who works for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (which is, or was,

funded by Yukos) and advised Yeltsin on the privatisation of Russian industry

In Russia, the financial-industrial groups provide financing to various parties and to the government. In Ukraine, the economic-political groups rather tend to own political parties. Lazarenko and Tymoshenko created the parliamentary party Hromada, as a company party of the Unified Energy Systems. Vadim Rabinovich has reportedly 'bought' the Green Party. Surkis and Medvedchuk reportedly own the United Social Democratic Party. However, Bakai, Pinchuk and the Franchuks support Kuchma directly and possibly his party the National-Democratic Party. Characteristically, all these oligarchic parties are considered centrist, that is, always prepared to make a deal without any real ideology.

Both Yushchenko and Yanukovich come from this sordid milieu. Only in the second election did Yanukovich identify himself solely with the Russian-speaking East. In the East, the old industries tended to remain intact. Yanukovich is the chairman of the Eastern regional party in the Donetsk and is the main spokesman for the Donetsk oligarchs headed by Rinat Achmetov, a multi-millionaire, one of the few Kuchma loyalists to remain with Yanukovich in the second election. In the second election Yanukovich began to play on the linguistic division of the country since the eastern half is made up of solidly Russian speakers, many of them descendants of those moved to the Ukraine by Stalin in the 1930's. Until 1934, the capital of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic was Kharkov because that is where the first Ukrainian Soviets had been set up in the 1918-21 period. Today those who voted for Yanukovich in the Presidential election of December 26th live largely in this region. Given that a good part of the working class in this region (which includes the Donbass) stand to lose their jobs in the

engineering, steel and coal industries if Yushchenko embarks on the new privatisation regime proposed by his American trained advisers, it is not surprising that Yanukovich (a sort of less entertaining John Prescott) turned his campaign (in the second election) into a defence of the jobs of the citizens of the Eastern Ukraine. To garner 44% of the votes in these circumstances was not such a surprising achievement and perhaps indicates that the first election (in which the state-controlled media all but ignored Yushchenko) might even have been more credible than the Western press made out.

The November election

However, this brings us to the real issue. Whether the first run-off election on November 21st was marred by ballot rigging as the West alleged is not really the point (as if the ballot in the US and Afghanistan elections was entirely beyond question, and as if there was a free media anywhere in this capitalist world!). The fact is that the United States had decided to declare the election of November 21st 2004 null and void before the results had been confirmed. We reproduce the State Department press release as it appeared on their website.

*For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
November 23, 2004*

*Statement on Ukrainian Elections
The United States is deeply disturbed by extensive and credible indications of fraud committed in the Ukrainian presidential election. We strongly support efforts to review the conduct of the election and urge Ukrainian authorities not to certify results until investigations of organized fraud are resolved. We call on the Government of Ukraine to respect the will of the Ukrainian people, and we urge all Ukrainians to resolve the situation through peaceful means. The Government bears a special responsibility not to use or incite violence, and to allow free media to report accurately on the situation*

without intimidation or coercion. The United States stands with the Ukrainian people in this difficult time.

Many commentators have pointed out that the same message could have been issued in reverse in the last two US elections but the intent is clear. The US had already declared for Yushchenko and his supporters.

And no wonder. As the "Orange Revolution" began, it was also clear that the demonstrations were not as spontaneous as our press sometimes made out. The opposition had been planning for weeks to start these demonstrations if the election was not declared in their favour. An arm of the Democratic Party, the so called National Democratic Institute, was busy over the last year spending \$40 millions of dollars provided by the State Department to help the opposition in the Ukraine to challenge the government party. A similar Republican Party organization, the Republican International Institute, was doing the same thing with more State Department money. According to the Ukrainian Centre for Political and Economic Research (UCPER), a poll of the mostly pro-Yushchenko Ukrainian Non-governmental Organisations (NGO's) reveals that foreign sponsors paid 60% of the costs, including:

Vidrodzhenya (*Revival*) sponsored by George Soros — 36.3%, 'Freedom House' (the U.S.) — 22.7%, 'Poland-America-Ukraine Cooperation Initiative' — 22.7%, USAID — 22.7%, National Endowment for Democracy (the U.S.)¹ — 18.2%, the World Bank — 13.6% (the total percentage exceeding 100%, since the respondents often named several sponsors).

Not only did Western political foundations channel money to Yushchenko's supporters (as they had done in Georgia), but they also flew in Serbian veterans of the political campaign to bring down Milosevic to instruct the demonstrators on tactics for the showdown. They set up the student movement *Pora* (It is Time) which was the backbone of the demonstrations against the first election result in November.² The Polish Government was also quick to react and sent Lech Walesa to join the demonstrators in Independence Square, whilst the Polish President, Aleksandr Kwasniecki, was one of the first to put pressure on Kuchma not to use the riot police

against the demonstrators. At first, the BBC radio news openly acknowledged this outside aid but, as the message came through that this must be downplayed, the only outside interference we heard about was that Putin had sent \$300 million to the rival camp of Yanukovich. The truth of the matter is that no election in any country in recent times has been so openly fought out between two imperialist claimants to the domination of that country.

The significance of the Ukraine

The Ukraine is strategically and economically important. It is a big country with a population of over 50 millions and a land area bigger than France. Its name means "borderland" and it has never really been anything else since the Kievan Rus moved their headquarters to Moscow in the eleventh century. Its borders have shifted continually since the fall of the Russian Empire.

Since the fall of the USSR it has faced an economic meltdown. Between 1992 and 2000, its *per capita* income fell 42%, whilst life expectancy was down by two and half years (which means 62 years for men, the second worst after Russia in Europe) but in the last few years there has been a recovery with a growth rate of 13%. Partly, this is because 4 million Ukrainians have left the country, sending back remittances from abroad (usually Poland). But of course, a lot of businessmen, particularly in Western Ukraine, have become very wealthy. As one of them told the *Financial Times*

This is the revolution of good burghers, of the well-dressed, well-spoken Kievites. They already have money. What they need is freedom for themselves, their businesses and their children.

— FT Magazine (January 8th 2005)

The same article goes on to quote the Swedish economist Anders Aslund (former Yeltsin adviser) that this is

Ukraine's 1848 — a true bourgeois revolution.

But if the Ukrainian bourgeoisie are a century and half late what does this tell us about Ukrainian nationalism? It is an artificial construction. Originally, the Russian state was founded in Kiev, capital of the Ukraine in the ninth century but the two branches of the Russians separated in the fight with the

Mongols. Until the nineteenth century, Ukrainians (also known as Little Russians under the Tsar, or Ruthenians in the West) did not have a separate national identity. The Tsars helped create one. The origin of nationalism was the language question. Ukrainian is a dialect of Russian, but, by trying to suppress it in the name of Great Russian chauvinism, the Tsars like Alexander III (1881-94) gave it life. Ukrainian historians then re-wrote the history of the land to prove that there was a Ukrainian nation. As B.H. Sumner stated in his *Survey of Russian History*

The fact has to be faced that none of the Ukrainians have ever established a truly independent national state.

op. cit., p199

Yushchenko spent most of his speeches appealing to Ukrainian national heroes of the past when he addressed the demonstrations in Kiev and claims that his regime will be the first truly independent Ukrainian state ever. But this is an illusion predicated on a lie. By taking over the Kuchma gangster state, the Yushchenko "bourgeoisie" are not a new class at all. Yushchenko himself is an apparatchnik who comes from the Russian-speaking north-east of the country. He trained as an accountant and worked his way up to be President of the National Bank of the Ukraine. Here he was involved in an international scandal, essentially lying to the International Monetary Fund about the quantity of Ukrainian cash reserves. As the *Financial Times* reported

Under his control, the bank was involved in a damaging row with the International Monetary Fund over the use of IMF loans to falsify the country's credit position — allowing some politicians, but not Mr Yushchenko, to benefit personally. He survived the ensuing scandal.

This scam which Yushchenko oversaw allowed the then Prime Minister of the Ukraine, Pavel Lazarenko (now in a US gaol on money-laundering charges), together with his cronies, to launder \$613 million. This was placed in the many bank accounts established abroad by the ex-nomenklatura in the succession states to the USSR. One beneficiary was undoubtedly Yuliya Timoshenko. She was a protégé of Lazarenko — both coming together from Dnepropetrovsk in the Russian East of the country, and became known as "the gas princess" as she was once head of United Energy Systems of the

Ukraine (UESU). She realised \$11bn of profits from UESU. According to *Alexander's Gas & Oil Connections*, she

Could realize these profits only with the help of state support. ... The amount of money involved has been highlighted by the Lazarenko affair. According to a report by the Financial Times, Pavel Lazarenko, who was Ukraine's prime minister in 1996-97, received at least \$ 72 m in bribe money from gas importer UESU. In return, Lazarenko helped UESU to become one of Ukraine's leading companies with an annual turnover of \$ 10 billion.

Yuliya Timoshenko and her husband were both arrested in connection with this scam but she posed as a "political prisoner" and was released. By this time she had formed her own political party (*Batkywschtschyna*) and was Deputy Prime Minister to Yushchenko. Yushchenko himself was made Prime Minister in 1999 by Kuchma as a reward for his successful deception of the IMF while Lazarenko was sacked for getting caught out! Timoshenko managed to squirrel away \$11 billion or 20% of Ukraine's wealth. She did this at a time when Ukrainian pensioners faced starvation! She was sacked by Kuchma over the scam and then attempted to get Yushchenko to join the opposition. It was only in 2001, when Yushchenko was himself sacked (for threatening to close unprofitable mines and steel plants), that he finally decided to join the opposition and found his own political party. He learned Ukrainian (not difficult if you know Russian) and began to read Ukrainian history. He has developed close relations with Madeleine Albright, Clinton's former Secretary of State, and is now also married an American citizen of Ukrainian origins. His wife, Kateryna Yushchenko, is no political innocent. She wields great influence and is a significant figure on the neo-conservative right in the US. She held office in the human rights bureau at the US State Department in the Reagan administration. These are the Ukraine's "bourgeois revolutionaries" who led an "Orange Revolution"!

Yushchenko's idea of national "independence" is also an illusion. His gang can break relatively free of Moscow but only at the price of embracing NATO and the West. By establishing a Western European type society with a press they (the

Yushchenko-Timoshenko) faction control and a legislative process which will favour their economic interests they hope to gain entry to the EU.

Although this has been enthusiastically supported by the US government, the response in the EU itself has been mixed. The very nature of the European Union is also now part of the imperialist manoeuvres. The pro-US camp (Poland and Britain at their head) want an ever wider EU so that the move towards a super-state (which would inevitably be a rival to the US) can be slowed down. The "deeper Europe" camp (headed by France and Germany) can already see that the European nations are now so divided that any common moves to create a counter-balance to the US are all but impossible. They are already talking of an inner core for Europe to restore their aim of making Europe more dominant in world affairs. Some French Euro-MPs have even denounced the Polish Government on the floor of the European Parliament for going outside a European foreign policy framework in the Ukraine.

A Russian disaster

But if Europe is confused the real loser has been Putin in Russia. With the loss of the Baltic states, now entering Europe, and with US bases appearing all over Central Asia, in Bosnia and Turkey as well as Georgia there is no doubt that Russia is increasingly on the retreat. The loss of the Ukraine is not only an enormous blow to Putin's prestige as Russian national leader (the Ukraine had never been a nation separate from Russia, except when it has been controlled by Germans or Poles, until 1990) but is a material weakening of Russian power. The struggle with the US for control of the Ukraine has been going on since the collapse of the USSR. In the early 1990's the US managed to stitch together an anti-Moscow alliance called GUUAM (which included Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova but this subsequently collapsed and, until twelve months ago, Putin had managed to re-assert Russian authority over the former empire. In fact he had even managed to reverse the inroads of the NATO powers on Russia's sphere of influence by setting up a new trading agreement with Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2003. Under this, Russia has made enormous investments in the

Ukraine's energy infrastructure as well as other aspects of its economy. As we suggested in previous articles³, the real issue is the control of the exploitation and distribution of oil and gas. Besides its own production, the Ukraine is the main route of the main gas pipeline from Russia to Western Europe (particularly Germany) as well as the Brody oil pipeline from Odessa (which currently carries only Russian oil). A new nationalist regime in Kiev could mean problems for Moscow's control of the supply and the revenue. Ironically, Putin seems to have overplayed his hand so that even Yanukovich supporters deserted their man in his final weeks in office because the Russian advisers he had brought in from Putin's own office in Moscow treated them as their servants.

Given Putin's blatant interference in the Ukrainian elections, it will be difficult for him to patch up any agreement with Yushchenko. Interestingly, Viktor Yushchenko has only inserted one meaningful statement in his vacuous post-election utterances and that is to state:

I would like to assure our Russian and European partners that the stable and dependable transportation of energy is guaranteed.

But then he goes on to state

Free trade initiatives with our eastern and western partners will move forward, including those that confirm Ukraine's status as a market economy and its readiness to join the World Trade Organisation membership. We shall soon announce our plans for ramping up Ukraine's relations with the European Union.

V. Yushchenko "Ukrainians have won the right to choose their destiny", Financial Times 28.12.05

In fact, even under Kuchma, the Ukraine was moving away from Russia. In terms of trade, for example, in 1994 trade with Russia was 47.5% of all Ukraine's foreign trade. This fell to 32% in 2001 and to 30% in 2002. At the same time, Kuchma had recognised that, if the Ukrainian armed forces were to be modernised he would have to go to the Americans, so the Ukraine has still got 1600 troops in Iraq (although they are now being withdrawn – one of Kuchma's last acts). Putin's recent actions against the business oligarchs in Russia who refuse to finance his regime has further alienated him from the West (even if it has made him more popular at home),

since businessmen don't usually end up in prison in the West however many lives they ruin. But, as he is increasingly forced into retreat, Putin could become more dangerous. His only card would be violent disruption. Already the defeated presidential candidate Yanukovich has raised the spectre of the Ukraine splitting between the Russian East and the Ukrainian West but this only helped alienate some of his own support. In the Ukraine itself, there is currently no stomach for a civil war of Serbian proportions on either side of the country. However, it would not be difficult for Putin to fan the flame of civil war, especially as Yushchenko has spent most of his time re-inventing a rather feeble Ukrainian national identity. As our comrades in the

Internationalist Communist Party concluded

The paradox in these events is that it is not the Ukrainians (whether from the east or the west, whether Catholic or Orthodox, whether farmers or miners) who want a secession. It is others represented by disgusting and self-seeking characters, whose political programmes are hardly distinguishable on any issue who lead this game, whilst the working class, unfortunately, is almost totally absent from the scene.

Battaglia Comunista 12 p.4 (December 2004)

In short if, in the unlikely event that the Ukraine does take the same path as Bosnia and Serbia and Kosovo, it will be entirely due to the meddling of the imperialist powers...

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Notes

¹ An extreme right wing body of the US neo-conservatives it funded the recent attempts to overthrow Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela

² The numbers in the demonstrations are also matter of debate. Sources in the Ukraine (which unfortunately have been unreliable in the past) suggest that only tens of thousands [mainly students] were actually involved. At first the Western media said it was hundreds of thousands but then raised this to "millions" after the second election result. Obviously they had to make it look like the 2 millions demonstrating against the war in Iraq in London on February 15th 2002 to little response from the British Government.

³ See *Another Episode of the New Great Game in Central Asia and the Caucasus in Revolutionary Perspectives 33* and *Barbarism in the Caucasus in Revolutionary Perspectives 15*

China

Continued from page 11

investigation into corrupt officials (e.g. Ferro-Alloy factory workers of Liaoyang); increased redundancy payments (e.g. Jilin oil workers); restitution of pensions, back wages and redundancy payments (e.g. Tieshu textile workers). At the time of writing the strike by 6000 textile workers in Xianyang reported by our sister publication in Italy, *Battaglia Comunista*, continues. Workers are demanding the rescinding of wage cuts and the layoff of 1000 workers and have faced police armed with water cannon, blocked railway lines in the process.

Imperialist Tensions

The "Chinese path to socialism" is following an all-too familiar capitalist route. It is forcing the working class to struggle. It is also leading to familiar capitalist contradictions for the capitalists themselves. For example, despite the vast ocean of unemployed, factory owners in the Pearl River delta of Guangdong province across the border from Hong Kong — the original hub of the CCP's opening up of the country to foreign trade — are complaining about the shortage of labour power. Again, according to official estimates, there is a shortage of about 2 million workers. Partly this reflects a skills shortage as the area

moves to higher level manufacturing (out of textiles into cars, for example) but it also illustrates the extent to which the attraction of producing in China is the extremely low wage rates. Once workers are in a position to demand higher wages the capitalists, look to invest elsewhere. So in China. The Pearl River delta's domination of production associated with foreign trade is giving way to the Yangtze delta and Shanghai.

This seaboard development of a capitalism dominated by foreign trade is reminiscent of the 19th century imperialist powers' occupation of the same areas after the forcible opening up of China by the British opium wars. Then though, the main aim of imperialism was to open up Chinese markets for their own manufactures, today they and their local partners are more concerned to exploit low-cost Chinese labour power to produce cheap commodities for the advanced capitalist market. As for the prospect of turning China into a vast market for consumer commodities, this will remain limited to certain local enclaves and the cities of the coastal strip around which will remain the unemployment and underemployment that capitalism always engenders to restrict the consumption of the masses.

By its "open door" policy Chinese capital has inserted itself into the world economy and shown she intends to become a power to be reckoned with. Having asserted herself as a "global player", she is now trying to secure oil and energy supplies; buying up western companies and persuading the EU to waive restrictions on the sale of military hardware (in the face of US opposition). Much less than generating a period of global peace and prosperity, the rise of China is a signal for the exacerbation of imperialist tensions in the period ahead.

ERayner

Notes

¹ *Financial Times* special report on Japan, 12th October 2004

² *Financial Times*, 19th November 2003

³ Figures from US Census Bureau Foreign Trade Statistics for 2004

⁴ In the first half of 2004 the U.S. Department of Commerce reported a record annual merchandise trade deficit of \$631 billion, an annual rate of well over 5% of GDP

⁵ "Soaring Imports of Oil and Chinese Goods Drive Deficit to New Record", see website of Economic Policy Institute, 13th August 2004

⁶ See *Revolutionary Perspectives 30*, "USA, Claims of Economic Recovery While the Dollar Slides"

⁷ *China Labour Bulletin*, "An Overview of Unemployment in China", www.china-labour.org

“A Majestic Prologue”¹

The Russian Revolution of 1905

Part One: Bloody Sunday: “a Momentous Lesson in Civil War”²

It is exactly 100 years since the 1905 revolution in Russia opened up the modern epoch of working-class history. It came at the end of a long period of relative social peace in Europe which followed the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune in May 1871. Although contemporaries did not realise it at the time, it began a period of working-class resistance which culminated in the victory of the October Revolution in 1917. As we have explained many times, the Russian October Revolution of 1917 itself gave the working class a real possibility for the only time in its history of overthrowing the world capitalist order. The story of how it was isolated to one huge but economically devastated territory, thus ending in a Stalinist tyranny, we have told elsewhere.³ It is our task to combat all the lies that have followed from that defeat in the 1920's in order to keep alive the notion that the working class, however it may stand at any given time, is the one class which has the permanent potential of really changing society. That message is even more important today when we have also come through a long period of working-class retreat. Once again, an increasingly confident, if not arrogant, ruling class is inflicting more barbarism and more misery on a proletariat over which it believes it has total control. The 1905 Revolution is an important episode even for us today, since it, too, began from unpromising, and even reactionary, beginnings. We are thus devoting two articles to re-examining the significance of that movement which Trotsky dubbed in his work *1905* “a majestic prologue” to the revolution of 1917. The actual soviets we will analyse in the second of our articles. What we would like to concentrate on here is the origin of the strikes and the movement which culminated in the historic emergence of soviets by October 1905.

The Revolution starts on unpromising terrain

Most people know that the event which sparked off the 1905 Revolution took place on January 22nd, 1905 and came to be known as “Vladimir”, or more commonly, “Bloody” Sunday. What many people (including apparently such writers as Tony Cliff⁴) often do not realise is that there was not one demonstration that day but several processions all involving thousands of workers, male and female with their children, converging on the Tsar's Winter Palace in the centre of St Petersburg from both north and south of the city. The correspondent for the *London Times*, hardly a supporter of the workers' cause, described what happened.

A more perfect and lovely day never dawned. The air was crisp and the sky almost cloudless. The gilded domes of the cathedrals and churches, brilliantly illuminated by the sun, formed a superb panorama. I noticed a significant change in the bearing of the passers-by. They were all wending their way, singly or in small groups, in the direction of the Winter Palace. Joining in the stream of workingmen, I proceeded in the direction of the Winter Palace. No observer could help being struck by the look of sullen determination on every face. Already a crowd of many thousands had collected, but was prevented from entering the square by mounted troops drawn up across the thoroughfare. Presently the masses began to press forward threateningly. The cavalry advanced at a walking pace, scattering the people right and left.

Event has succeeded event with such bewildering rapidity that the public is staggered and shocked beyond measure. The first trouble began at 11 o'clock, when the military tried to turn back some thousands of strikers at one of the bridges. The same thing happened almost simultaneously at

other bridges, where the constant flow of workmen pressing forward refused to be denied access to the common rendezvous in the Palace Square. The Cossacks at first used their knouts, then the flat of their sabres, and finally they fired. The strikers in the front ranks fell on their knees and implored the Cossacks to let them pass, protesting that they had no hostile intentions. They refused, however, to be intimidated by blank cartridges, and orders were given to load with ball. The passions of the mob broke loose like a bursting dam. The people, seeing the dead and dying carried away in all directions, the snow on the streets and pavements soaked with blood, cried aloud for vengeance. Meanwhile the situation at the Palace was becoming momentarily worse. The troops were reported to be unable to control the vast masses which were constantly surging forward. Reinforcements were sent, and at 2 o'clock here also the order was given to fire. Men, women, and children fell at each volley, and were carried away in ambulances, sledges, and carts. The indignation and fury of every class were aroused. Students, merchants, all classes of the population alike were inflamed. At the moment of writing, firing is going on in every quarter of the city.

Father Gapon, marching at the head of a large body of workmen, carrying a cross and other religious emblems, was wounded in the arm and shoulder. The two forces of workmen are now separated. Those on the other side of the river are arming with swords, knives, and smiths' and carpenters' tools, and are busy erecting barricades. The troops are apparently reckless, firing right and left, with or without reason. The rioters continue to appeal to them, saying, “You are Russians! Why play the part of bloodthirsty butchers?” Dreadful anxiety prevails in every household where any members are absent. Distracted husbands, fathers,

wives, and children are searching for those missing. The surgeons and Red Cross ambulances are busy. A night of terror is in prospect.

From *Readings in Modern European History*, James Harvey Robinson and Charles Beard, eds., vol. 2 (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1908), pp. 373-375

Father Gapon, the leader of this demonstration, was in the pay of the secret police but he had been pushed further than his masters intended in drawing up the petition. He was wounded as he led a group of workers towards the Narva Gate, on the southern approaches to the city and miles from the Winter Palace. The Tsar, Nicholas II had retreated to his palace outside the city at Tsarskoe Selo but had left instructions that no workers were to reach the Winter Palace. The massacre which many Bolsheviks (and indeed other socialists) had predicted was thus prepared in advance. A peaceful crowd which was singing "God Save the Tsar" and carrying pictures of their "Little Father" had been persuaded by Gapon to support a petition to the Tsar. The full text of this petition can be read in the panel on this and the following pages.

Readers can judge for themselves what the significance of this text is. We have reproduced it in full to underline the fact that it was not a direct emanation of the workers' struggles but a product of the left liberal intellectuals around Father George Gapon. The petition lived up to its name. It literally begged Nicholas II to create the conditions for a better life but it was not a workers' document even if Trotsky thought it

not only replaced the hazy phraseology of liberal resolutions with the incisive slogans of political democracy, but also filled those slogans with class content by demanding the right to strike and the eight hour day.

1905, p90

The petition was hardly very revolutionary in any state other than an autocracy. The liberals had been told by Nicholas II at the beginning of his reign that their demand for representative government was "a senseless dream". Now they wanted to link the workers demands for a better life to their own democratic programme. The main purpose of the petition was to draw on the wave of discontent then expressed by the strike of workers in the great Putilov factory in St Petersburg into the campaign for

a constitution being waged by the liberals (who were on the verge of founding their own political party — the Constitutional Democrats or *Kadets*, for short). However, it was also a programme in which every class of Russian society could find its own demands. As Trotsky also commented,

its historical significance lies, however, not in the text but in the fact. The petition was only the prologue to an action which united the working masses.

In short, though it was a clever attempt by the bourgeois intelligentsia to get the workers and peasants to do the fighting and dying for their programme, it was doomed to fail as they had no real social or political basis for that programme. The demands for elections and constitutional freedom was, in the minds of the liberals (most of who would be regarded as conservatives in any Western European society, even at that time), the real issue. However, the demands to end redemption payments (which peasants had to pay for 57 years as a compensation to their former landlords for their "emancipation" from serfdom in 1861), redistribution of the land and an end to indirect taxes were all aimed at the getting the support of the

Gapon's Petition

Sovereign!

We, workers and inhabitants of the city of St. Petersburg, members of various *sosloviia* (estates of the realm), our wives, children, and helpless old parents, have come to you, Sovereign, to seek justice and protection. We are impoverished and oppressed, we are burdened with work, and insulted. We are treated not like humans [but] like slaves who must suffer a bitter fate and keep silent. And we have suffered, but we only get pushed deeper and deeper into a gulf of misery, ignorance, and lack of rights. Despotism and arbitrariness are suffocating us, we are gasping for breath. Sovereign, we have no strength left. We have reached the limit of our patience. We have come to that terrible moment when it is better to die than to continue unbearable sufferings.

And so we left our work and declared to our employers that we will not return to work until they meet our demands. We do not ask much; we only want that without which life is hard labour and eternal suffering. Our first request was that our employers discuss our needs together with us. But they refused to do this; they denied us the right to speak about our needs, on the grounds that the law does not provide us with such a right. Also unlawful were our other requests: to reduce the working day to eight hours; for them to set wages together with us and by agreement with us; to examine our disputes with lower-level factory administrators; to increase the wages of unskilled workers and women to one ruble per day; to abolish overtime work; to provide medical care attentively and without insult; to build shops so that it is possible to

work there and not face death from the awful drafts, rain and snow.

Our employers and the factory administrators considered all this to be illegal: every one of our requests was a crime, and our desire to improve our condition was slanderous insolence.

Sovereign, there are thousands of us here; outwardly we are human beings, but in reality neither we nor the Russian *narod* [people] as a whole are provided with any human rights, even the right to speak, to think, to assemble, to discuss our needs, or to take measures to improve our conditions. They have enslaved us and they did so under the protection of your officials, with their aid and with their cooperation. They imprison and send into exile any one of us who has the courage to speak on behalf of the interests

peasants. In fact, despite Trotsky's enthusiasm, the working class demands were more ambiguously represented. Gapon and his pals, under increasing pressure from the few Social Democrats who could get a hearing, could not get out of putting forward some workers demands such as the eight hour day and the right to strike, but these sat awkwardly with demands for representation for the capitalist class, whilst the talk of naval contracts only going to Russian firms smacked of the military nationalism then reigning amongst the bourgeoisie throughout Europe.

The Condition of the Working Class in Russia in 1900

The document actually reveals little about the conditions of the working class in Russia. Trotsky, in his memorable work, 1905, announced that

Our revolution destroyed the myth of the "uniqueness of Russia", by which he meant that, for the first time, the class struggle in Russia began to take on the appearance of the class struggle in the rest of Europe. However,

it had not appeared that way before 1904-5. This was the origin of the "myth" that Trotsky had spoken about. In 1899, Lenin had demonstrated, in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, that Russia was now a capitalist country, showing that a class of landless labourers formed a sizeable proletariat in both town and country, but the bulk of Social Democrats (Lenin included), still thought that the Russian revolution would be a bourgeois democratic rather than a proletarian revolution. However, the feebleness of the Russian bourgeoisie and the appalling conditions of exploitation of Russian workers in the Tsarist state were soon to confound these expectations.

Trotsky was preparing himself to revise this opinion when he clearly demonstrated that the Russian autocratic state had always been forced by outside military needs and pressures to constantly take the lead in developing the means of production. Thus by the mid-nineteenth century

By the time our developing bourgeois society began to feel the need for the political institutions of the West the autocracy, aided by European technology and European capital had already transformed itself into the

*largest capitalist entrepreneur, the largest banker, the monopoly owner of railways and of liquor retail shops. In this it was supported by the centralised bureaucratic apparatus, which was in no way suited for regulating the new relations, but was perfectly capable of applying systematic repression with considerable energy.*⁵

Massive indirect taxation extorted surplus value from the peasants and artisans and the bulk of the state expenditure (above 80% in the eighteenth century and never below 50% even in the late nineteenth century) went on the military — not so much to fight foreign wars as to police the internal territory of the huge Russian Empire. The incapacity to fight more technologically advanced foreign foes was fully revealed in the Crimean War when Russia, despite fighting on home soil, despite facing an incompetent enemy (this is the Charge of the Light Brigade period in British military history!) and despite the enormous self-sacrifice of its serf army, still lost. Alexander II came to the throne in the middle of this war and, though no raving reformer, concluded that there was no alternative but to abolish serfdom from above "before it begins to abolish itself from below".

Gapon's Petition

of the working class and of the people. They punish us for a good heart and a responsive spirit as if for a crime. To pity a downtrodden and tormented person with no rights is to commit a grave crime. The entire working people and the peasants are subjected to the proizvol (arbitrariness) of a bureaucratic administration composed of embezzlers of public funds and thieves who not only have no concern at all for the interests of the Russian people but who harm those interests. The bureaucratic administration has reduced the country to complete destitution, drawn it into a shameful war, and brings Russia ever further towards ruin. We, the workers and the people, have no voice in the expenditure of the enormous sums that are collected from us. We do not even know where the money collected

from the impoverished people goes. The people is deprived of any possibility of expressing its wishes and demands, or of participating in the establishment of taxes and in their expenditure. Workers are deprived of the possibility of organizing into unions to defend their interests. Sovereign! Does all this accord with the law of God, by Whose grace you reign? And is it possible to live under such laws? Would it not be better if we, the toiling people of all Russia, died? Let the capitalists — exploiters of the working class — and the bureaucrats — embezzlers of public funds and the pillagers of the Russian people — live and enjoy themselves.

Sovereign, this is what we face and this is the reason that we have gathered before the walls of your palace. Here we seek our last salvation. Do not refuse to come to the aid of your people;

lead it out of the grave of poverty, ignorance, and lack of rights; grant it the opportunity to determine its own destiny, and deliver it from them the unbearable yoke of the bureaucrats. Tear down the wall that separates you from your people and let it rule the country together with you. You have been placed [on the throne] for the happiness of the people; the bureaucrats, however, snatch this happiness out of our hands, and it never reaches us; we get only grief and humiliation. Sovereign, examine our requests attentively and without any anger; they incline not to evil, but to the good, both for us and for you. Ours is not the voice of insolence but of the realisation that we must get out of a situation that is unbearable for everyone. Russia is too big, her needs are too diverse and many, for her

The abolition of serfdom in 1861 started the process of capitalist development in earnest as many peasants now became landless labourers and thus proletarians. Many gravitated to the towns over the next two generations as Russia went through a belated industrial revolution sponsored by the state and foreign (almost entirely French) capital.

This had enormous consequences for the nature of the development of Russian society. Not only did it stifle the formation of an indigenous entrepreneurial bourgeoisie but it ensured that capitalist development would be late and under the auspices of the state. This also had consequences for the nature of the Russian Empire's proletariat. Contrary to some historians the proletariat did form a significant portion of Russian society by 1905. Whilst most histories claim that only 3 millions were proletarians, according to the 1897 census more than 9 millions were actually employed in mines, factories and transport. With their dependents the figure rises to over 20 millions which makes them 27.8% of the Russian population. They were, of course not classed by officialdom as "proletarian" or even "working class" but as "peasants" since Tsarism did not

recognise the new category even in its 1910 census (where two thirds of the population of St Petersburg were classed as "peasants"!). There was a good degree of wishful thinking amongst the ruling class (including the man most responsible for that industrialisation, Sergei Witte) that Russia might industrialise but without creating a proletariat in the image of that troublesome class in the West.

They were not without some hopes in this direction. After all, in 1905 40% of Russian workers had been born peasants. As these workers were much more tied to the land than their Western counterparts, many sent home money to pay the extraordinarily high taxes on peasant communal land and to pay the redemption dues which the peasants were still paying over half a century since their "emancipation" in 1861. Many returned for the summer to help bring in the harvest and most were illiterate. The chief educational experience they derived was still through the Orthodox Church which preached loyalty to the Tsar as the representative of God on earth.

However, this is only one side of the picture. In first place, the majority of the working class were, by 1900, second or third generation, and less

dominated by a peasant past. Furthermore, the horrors of industrialisation which had hit Western European proletarians in the nineteenth century were still being visited on Russian workers in the early twentieth century. In most cases the situation was worse than that described by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, written in 1843-4. Single males lived in hostels which often had no sanitation, no heating and where even the right to a lice-ridden bed was only for the duration of the non-working time. Families often had no homes but often slept on the machinery of the factory in which they worked. This probably accounts for the low level of child labour in factories compared to the earlier period in Western Europe. Those under ten years tended to be left in the village with the grandparents. This meant that there was a preponderance of workers, aged between twenty and forty, of both sexes in the St Petersburg and Moscow proletariat. It was a highly concentrated proletariat too, not only confined to a few geographical areas connected with mining, textiles and engineering such as Kharkov and the Donbass in the Ukraine, but also the two principal cities and the areas around them. In the cities, factories were modern in terms

Gapon's Petition

to be ruled only by bureaucrats. We need popular representation; it is necessary for the people to help itself and to administer itself. After all, only the people knows its real needs. Do not fend off its help, accept it, and order immediately, at once, that representatives of the Russian land from all classes, all estates of the realm be summoned, including representatives from the workers. Let the capitalist be there, and the worker, and the bureaucrat, and the priest, and the doctor and the teacher — let everyone, whoever they are, elect their representatives. Let everyone be free and equal in his voting rights, and to that end order that elections to the Constituent Assembly be conducted under universal, secret and equal suffrage. This is our main request, everything is based on it; it is the main and only poultice for

our painful wounds, without which those wounds must freely bleed and bring us to a quick death.

But no single measure can heal all our wounds. Other measures are necessary, and we, representing of all of Russia's toiling class, frankly and openly speak to you, Sovereign, as to a father, about them.

The following are necessary:

- Measures against the ignorance of the Russian people and against its lack of rights.
- Immediate freedom and return home for all those who have suffered for their political and religious convictions, for strike activity, and for peasant disorders.
- Immediate proclamation of the freedom and inviolability of the person, of freedom of speech and of the press, of freedom of assembly, and of

freedom of conscience in matters of religion.

- Universal and compulsory public education at state expense.
- Accountability of government ministers to the people and a guarantee of lawful administration.
- Equality of all before the law without exception.
- Separation of church and state
- Measures against the poverty of the people
- Abolition of indirect taxes and their replacement by a direct, progressive income tax.
- Abolition of redemption payments, cheap credit, and the gradual transfer of land to the people.
- Naval Ministry contracts should be filled in Russia, not abroad.
- Termination of the war according to the will of the

of the constant capital employed and with the latest in Fordist organisation with huge concentrations of workers. If the factories were modern, working conditions most definitely were not. The eleven-hour day for six days a week was the norm and wages could often be cut (there were extensive fines for the slightest misdemeanour). In a police state the slightest attempt at organisation or protest was often met with rifles and banishment.

The state consciously tried to keep the Russian workers in the same state of subservience as the peasants. In the village communities (the *mir*) after 1861 the committee of elders (*starosti*) were responsible for maintaining law and order, re-dividing the land and generally replaced the role of the landlord. For the state this was important as they had someone they could hold responsible and blame if there were any problems or disorder. From May 1901 it was decided by the Tsar's ministers that the same thing could be applied to workers. They had been worried that the delegates who the workers had elected during the increasingly frequent strikes (often at the request of the employers) were then almost always sacked by the same bosses. This went against the grain of a supposedly paternalistic society so they decided to pass a law in 1903 to impose *starosti* on the workers and the employers. Employers often refused to

recognise them and the workers regarded them with suspicion. One Social Democratic leaflet summed up the attitude

*Comrades! We need no starosti and no lackeys of our masters; what we need are workers' organisations and workers societies. You see how they fooled us with starosti ... We need freedom of association, of assembly, of speech and of the press.*⁶

The *starosti* also turned out to be useless in preventing a massive strike wave which broke out in Southern Russia in 1902-3, involving 225,000 workers. The rising tide of workers strikes and peasant revolts in this period prompted Plehve, the Minister of the Interior (Home Secretary) to ask for ten years in which he could use extreme brutality to crush the growing workers movement. At the same time, he also advised the Tsar that what would reunite the country would be "short victorious war" to revive patriotic feeling. However, war needs preparation, not least amongst the population that is expected to fight it. The drive to find a warm water port in the Far East led to rivalry with Japan. The Russian ruling class were convinced that Japan was even more backward than Russia (an "intelligence failure" that would have done credit to the current CIA) and dealt provocatively with all the embassies the Japanese government sent to

negotiate.⁷ The Japanese thus launched a Pearl Harbor-type strike on Port Arthur in China where the Russian Pacific Fleet was based. With this destroyed, Japanese troops could pour into Korea to lay siege to Port Arthur and confront the Russian Army in Manchuria. A war that had begun without popular enthusiasm was turning into a nightmare for the Russian ruling class. Two of its most brutal defenders, Plehve and the Tsar's uncle Grand Duke Sergei were assassinated by Socialist Revolutionaries, but the increasing privation and inflation brought about by the war led to a revival of the very strikes and peasant disturbances the war was meant to end.

The "Zubatovschina"

This was the background to the strike at the great Putilov Works in St Petersburg in December 1904. However, the Tsarist state was not yet too concerned as it had still had other schemes to get control of the workers' struggles. In 1901, the rise of a new wave of struggle which saw workers turning towards the Social Democrats for the first time, and the failure of the *starosti*, led the Chief of Police in Moscow, Sergei Zubatov, to experiment with another technique to try to keep workers' demands on an economic level. He had set up the Society for Mutual Aid for Workers in

Gapon's Petition

people.

- Measures against the oppression of labour by capital
- Abolition of the office of factory inspector.
- Establishment in factories and plants of permanent commissions elected by the workers, which jointly with the administration are to investigate all complaints coming from individual workers. A worker cannot be fired except by a resolution of this commission.
- Freedom for producer-consumer cooperatives and workers' trade unions — at once.

- An eight-hour working day and regulation of overtime work.
- Freedom for labour to struggle with capital — at once.
- Wage regulation — at once.
- Guaranteed participation of representatives of the working classes in drafting a law on state insurance for workers — at once.

These, sovereign, are our main needs, about which we have come to you; only when they are satisfied will the liberation of our Motherland from slavery and destitution be possible, only then can she flourish, only then can workers organize to defend their interests from insolent exploitation by capitalists and by

the bureaucratic administration that plunders and suffocates the people. Give the order, swear to meet these needs, and you will make Russia both happy and glorious, and your name will be fixed in our hearts and the hearts of our posterity for all time—but if you do not give the order, if you do not respond to our prayer, then we shall die here, on this square, in front of your palace. We have nowhere else to go and no reason to. There are only two roads for us, one to freedom and happiness, the other to the grave. Let our lives be sacrificed for suffering Russia. We do not regret that sacrifice, we embrace it eagerly.
Georgii Gapon, priest
Ivan Vasimov, worker

Mechanical Industries in Moscow which turned out to be so successful that they were extended to other cities such as Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov and Minsk. At first, attempts by Social Democrats to get involved in them were repulsed as the still conservative workers did not want to politicise their struggle for better wages and working conditions. The police agents in the midst of the workers were so determined to maintain loyalty to the Tsar that they actually promised the workers that factories might be nationalised if employers did not cooperate with the societies.

As one Bolshevik historian put it

Zubatov's agents went so far as to promise that the government would soon have the factories taken away from the employers and handed over to the workmen. The government they said was ready to do anything for the workers, if they stopped listening to the 'petty intelligentsia'. In some strikes the police actually supported the strikers, paid them relief money and so on.⁸

The Bolsheviks had clearly understood that the aim of the Zubatov unions was to prevent the extension of the class movement and opposed them. However, as the waves of strikes and the crisis built up towards 1905 these unions suddenly acquired a different importance as they were one of the few legal ways in which revolutionaries could discuss with the working class without being arrested. Lenin was already worried that the Bolsheviks (and indeed all Social Democrats) had little impact amongst the working class in general and realised that the Zubatov unions might not actually fulfil their planned purpose for the regime. He saw that as the workers became more radical they would be forced into more political action. He thus urged the Bolsheviks to join the Zubatov unions and if possible take the lead in them. This was, at first resisted by local Bolsheviks leaders for the very sound reason that their purpose was well-known. Their first attempts to influence them were also not welcomed and indeed before 1905 they had made little headway. This experience offers lessons for revolutionaries today. We have to understand that organisations which contain workers but which appear to have unpromising beginnings may actually be capable of development under the force of the class struggle. In certain circumstances of developing

class struggle the apparent and the real are not always the same thing. What we need to see is what is actually happening in the underlying class struggle and try to keep in touch with it.

What had made it clear that Zubatovism was going to backfire was a strike led by Zubatov unions in Odessa in July 1902. It received solid support from virtually the whole city which led almost automatically to political demands for an end to police repression, etc. The strike then spread throughout Southern Russia in 1903 and Zubatov was sacked and sent into exile. However, some seeds for the immediate future had already been planted. Zubatov's plans had called for the election of factory-wide workers committees in Moscow

...chairmen were chosen by workers assemblies in many sections of the city, and these met regularly and formed a "council (soviet) of the workers in mechanical industries". This council was the highest level to which workers could turn with problems and grievances; it monitored compliance with legal regulations in factories and, if necessary, negotiated with factory inspectors. After the liquidation of Zubatov's society at the end of 1903, activity of the soviet stopped as well; some of its members were active in 1905 in establishing trades unions.⁹

Obviously these councils or soviets were hardly revolutionary, and disappeared by the end of 1903, but in the absence of a trades union tradition they were one of the few forms of struggle that Russian workers had to look to when the practical needs of coordinating a whole series of strikes over a wide range of industries and places became a burning necessity in the summer of 1905. If the Russian working class had had a strong trades union tradition it is unlikely that would they have stumbled upon an entirely new form of organisation of representation for a mass society. As it was the soviets, the bodies which came into being, united in a practical way, both the economic and the political

demands of the workers. However, the process of their emergence was to take several more months yet.

The Consequences of Bloody Sunday

At the end of 1904, Zubatov might have disappeared but his agents still carried on his work. In St Petersburg the police union was called the "Assembly of Russian Factory and Workshop Workers", and was led by Gapon. He was able to tap into the very mixed class consciousness of the young working class in order to exclude Socialists from the movement and convince the workers that the Tsar was really on their side against the capitalists. The number of strikes in St Petersburg had been increasing at the end of 1904 and when four members of Gapon's union were sacked 12 000 workers downed tools on January 3rd 1905. By January 7th, 140 000 Petersburg workers were on strike. In order to keep the anger of the workers in check, Gapon suggested the procession to the Winter Palace (carrying the petition we have printed above). Once their peaceful petition of supplication had been ripped to shreds by the sabres of the Cossacks, Gapon¹⁰ could announce that the Tsar was "a traitor" but the proletariat was already ahead of him. A strike wave unprecedented in Russian history

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swept the country involving 122 towns and localities, several mines in the Donets Basin and ten of Russia's railways. More than a million workers were on strike at any one time. Both Rosa Luxemburg (who was in Russia at the time), and Trotsky noted how the strike wave developed along both economic and political lines, the one sometimes supplanting the other.

Luxemburg exaggerates the influence of Social Democracy within the workers struggles before 1905 to strengthen her case that the action went beyond Social Democratic ideas of an organised general strike (a debate she was having in the German Social Democratic Party) but she is basically correct when she says that the general strikes of January and February 1905

soon fell into an unending series of local, partial, economic strikes in separate districts, towns departments

professions – and on the other hand penetrated to the domestic servants, the minor police officials and even to the stratum of the lumpenproletariat, and simultaneously surged from the towns to the countryside and even knocked at the iron gates of the military barracks.¹¹

It might have knocked but it did not get an answer. The military, despite the mutiny aboard the battleships Potemkin and Royal George, despite the disasters in the Far East, largely remained loyal to the Tsarist state, thus ensuring the ultimate defeat of the revolutionary wave of 1905. But this is to anticipate. Tsarism had basically lost control of Russia. Trotsky (writing at the time) was equally expansive in his description of the period after Bloody Sunday.

Trade after trade, factory after factory, town after town are stopping

occur because the economic struggle has found expression in certain well-defined demands; on the contrary, the demands are chosen and formulated because there has to be a strike.

Or in short,

After 9 January the revolution knows no stopping.¹²

Employers mainly conceded all the demands the workers put in this period, but often this did not end the strike as fresh demands were made. The fact was that the murders which had taken place in Odessa and elsewhere in previous struggles in the 1902-4 period were also now being avenged. There were so many strikes at this time that many went unreported. However, all the strikes remained economic. Rosa Luxemburg made a virtue of this spontaneity by arguing that this was because "revolutions do not allow anyone to play the school master with them". This is wonderful writing but



The scene in front of the Winter Palace, on Bloody Sunday, January 22nd 1905

and factories. Throughout the whole of the spring of 1905 and into the middle of the summer there fermented throughout the whole of the immense empire an uninterrupted economic strike of almost the entire proletariat against capital – a struggle which caught on the one hand, all the petit-bourgeois and liberal professions – commercial employees, technicians, actors and members of artistic

work. The railway personnel act as the detonators of the strike; the railway lines are the channels along which the strike epidemic spreads. Economic claims are advanced and are satisfied wholly or in part, almost at once. But neither the beginning of the strike nor its end is fully determined by the nature of the claims made or by the forms in which they are met. The strike does not

ignore reality. What it describes is the fact that the strikes which followed Bloody Sunday had no political leadership and did not challenge the Russian state until October. Luxemburg vaguely recognises this by stating that Social Democrats should not worry about "the technical side" of the mass strike (i.e., planning one) but are instead

called upon to assume **political leadership in the midst of the revolutionary period**.¹³

This is much closer to the truth about the relationship between the political party and the class struggle precisely but in reality the Social Democrats (of all factions) were actually very weak at the beginning of 1905. The strike itself helped them to overcome this weakness but by the time they were in a position to be more influential Tsarism has worked out a strategy for survival.

In the meantime it was the machinations of Tsarism that once again provided the workers with a means for organising themselves. In order to make a show of listening to the workers, the Tsarist Government set up two commissions. The most important was that of Shidlovsky, whose brief was to investigate "the causes of the dissatisfaction of the St Petersburg workers". The commission only lasted two weeks, but it called for the elections of workers' representatives to take part, chosen by the workers themselves, who were divided into nine electoral divisions according to trade. The Social Democrats saw the potential of using these elections and campaigned, although the Mensheviks thought they were the beginning of something significant, while the Bolsheviks did not expect anything from them, but wanted to use the elections to reach more workers. They had learned the lesson of the Zubatov unions.

The Shidlovsky Commission of 400 workers representatives met on February 17th (March 2nd). Although only having about 10% of the delegates the Bolsheviks' influence ensured that the workers submitted a list on non-negotiable demands which included freedom of speech and assembly, and release of arrested electors. Predictably the government refused the demands and three days later shut down the Commission.

*The real significance of the Shidlovsky Commission lay in another area; by electing deputies in the factories, it prepared the way for the soviets to represent the metropolitan working class.*¹⁴

Anweiler goes on to argue that "the strike movement was spontaneous in the true sense of the word". In a sense he is correct. They were not started by parties (which were too weak) or by unions (which did not exist) but, as we

have tried to show here, they did not come out of a clear blue sky. They were the product of definable tendencies in Russian working-class history. Because unions were illegal, because workers were faced with the oppressive power of a police state, the relatively young proletariat of the recently industrialised Tsarist Empire were faced with no organs of mediation to which they could take their immediate demands. Bloody Sunday proved that even the most basic of demands would be met with massacres even when the petitioners carried religious icons and pictures of the Tsar. Lenin wasn't exaggerating when he wrote three days after Bloody Sunday

*The working class has received a momentous lesson in civil war, the revolutionary education of the proletariat made more progress in one day than it could have made in months and years of drab existence.*¹⁵

It was to make even more progress in the autumn of 1905 and that is what we shall turn to in the second part of this article.

Jock

Notes

1 Trotsky in his Preface to the first edition of *1905* [Pelican, 1973]. The benefit of hindsight allowed Trotsky in 1922 to give it this title.

2 Lenin *Works* Vol. 8, p97

3 See our pamphlet, *1917*, and the articles originally published in *Workers' Voice* on the development of the counter-revolution in Russia (soon to be republished as a pamphlet). See also "1921 Beginning of the Counter-revolution?" in *Internationalist Communist 21*

4 In Volume I of his four volume biography of *Lenin* [Pluto Press, 1975]

5 *1905*, p27

6 quoted in Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets* [New York 1974] p.26

7 The Japanese had had their own Crimean shock in 1853, when Commodore Perry sailed a US fleet unopposed into Edo Bay. This soon led to the fall of the Tokogawa Shogunate and the sending of Japanese mission to Europe, especially Britain, where several ships were built for the Japanese Navy, which was, by 1904, one of the most modern in the

world. The Russian ruling class not only seemed to be unaware of this, but regarded the Japanese as racially inferior. Nicholas II was known to refer to them as "little brown monkeys" (which suggests he had never meet a Japanese citizen!).

8 M.N. Pokrovsky, quoted in T. Cliff, *Lenin*, Vol. 1, p150

9 Anweiler, *op. cit.* p27

10 Gapon was wounded, but rescued by his followers, and subsequently smuggled into exile where he met Lenin. He joined the Socialist Revolutionaries and returned to Russia but once again got in contact with the secret police. When this was discovered by his SR comrades, they hanged him in a forest outside Petersburg in 1907.

11 *The Mass Strike* (Colombo, 1970), p29

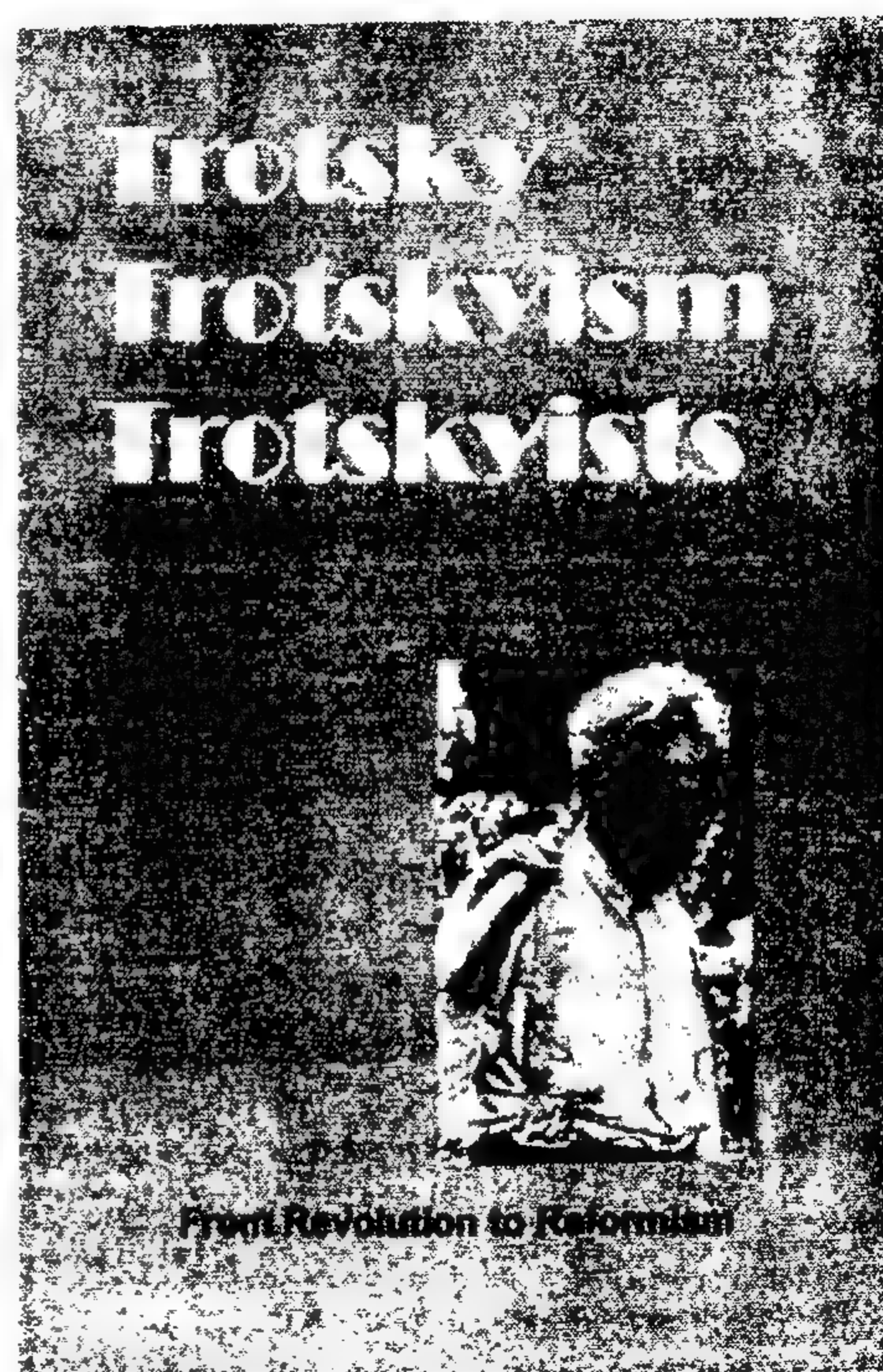
12 Both quotes from *1905*, p98. The date under the old Julian calendar (used by the Russian Orthodox Church) was 9th January. Under the Gregorian calendar adopted by the Bolsheviks in early 1918, the date was January 22nd.

13 *The Mass Strike*, p51

14 O. Anweiler, p37

15 "The Beginning of the Revolution in Russia" in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, p422

**Our pamphlet on Trotskyism is
£2.50 from the group address**



Gruppe Internationale SozialistInnen

Meeting in Berlin

The document which follows is the text of an introduction to a meeting of the *Gruppe Internationale SozialistInnen* (GIS) in Berlin last December. The comrades had invited the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party to address the meeting as they say said they "wish to present an opportunity for people to get to know the basic positions of this political current".

As will be clear from the text we were indebted to the comrades of the GIS for their translation of our talk into German and in the subsequent discussion. It will also be clear that the talk had to try to cover not only the recent past in the British and Italian working class struggle but also to outline our framework for political work. This was not always clear to some of the audience who asked various questions about why we had not spoken about what the class as a whole would do. Indeed some questioners from a Trotskyist background asked if we thought that the Party alone would make the revolution. These were welcome questions, although a bit disturbing as the text of the speech shows, we took the future development of class struggle as a given factor in history. It is not (perhaps thankfully!) a factor which we can either predict accurately nor control as a revolutionary minority. What we had concentrated on were the tasks of revolutionary minorities which was the only thing we were responsible for. In response to further questions

(mainly from member of the International Communist Current) we were also able to clarify the fact that we do not rule out new and spontaneous developments in the class. The problem is that though speculation about them might be an entertaining game it is not a fruitful activity for revolutionaries. Indeed, the whole history of the relations of party and class show that where a self-proclaimed revolutionary organisation has claimed to understand the march of history, history, in the form of new waves of working class struggle and new forms of working class organisation has usually gone ahead of them. Only those organisations which are really revolutionary can understand this and can alter their perspectives and activities to meet the new situation.

What the Bureau stands for is a Revolutionary Party (and once again we underlined the fact that we are not that party) which is a real reflection of the most advanced workers. To do this, we have to find means and instruments to keep us in contact with workers who engage in this struggle here or another struggle somewhere else. As capitalism is indubitably a global system and as its overthrow has to be at the level of the political means of repression (i.e., the State) only a political instrument of the working class which is centralised and international can achieve this. Our advocacy of factory groups and territorial groups is an attempt to keep

those workers who are pushed in their economic struggles to reflect more on the political needs of the wider class struggle. Under current conditions, they are not ready to accept the kind of organisation or political

coherence demanded by the party but are prepared to unite with other workers who may be pushed along the same lines. Our hope is that we can thus keep workers from one struggle in touch with the next set of workers in the next struggle which might be months or even years away. We have also found that the restructuring of capital has smashed the old Fordist conceptions of huge factories but that there are workers in the same geographical areas who can be linked to fight on specific issues. These we call territorial groups. We expect these groups to rise and fall but we do not expect all of their participants to simply disappear back into the "citizenry". It will be the tasks of members of the future party to carry out the widest possible education of the workers who get involved in the struggle. Our final question to the people in the meeting was to ask them what would be their strategy other than await for the spontaneous eruption and then to go around leafleting groups of workers as if they had descended from Mars.

A comrade of the *Gruppe Internationale Kommunisten*, a group in Austria sympathising with the International Bureau, then gave an added introduction on the situation in Germany following the strikes in the Opel plant in Bochum which had paralysed the entire General Motors distribution network. The workers had succeeded in reducing the number of layoffs from 10 000 to 4 000 and saved the plant but then were persuaded to "compromise" by union leaders and it is clear that once new contingency plans are made, General Motors will be back for more cuts. As this is taking place at the same time as cuts in German unemployment benefits (the so-called Harz IV legislation) the German working class will find itself in much the same position as its British comrades were in in the 1980's. It seems that there will be plenty of opportunities for revolutionaries to intervene in the coming year. And we are confident that the GIS and the other comrades in Germany will rise to the challenge.

The *Gruppe Internationale Sozialisten* publish *Sozialismus oder Barbarei*, and can be contacted at
GIS c/o Rotes Antiquariat
Rungestraße 20
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Crisis, Class Composition and the International Perspectives for Class Struggle

Comrades,

It is a great privilege to be addressing a meeting in Berlin, a city where Marx once studied, even though it was to be his observation of the reality of the class struggle elsewhere which turned those studies towards the revolutionary goal of proletarian emancipation. More than a century and half later, we are dedicated to keeping that goal in sight. Although I cannot speak the native language of Marx, I hope to at least do honour to the scientific language he gave us to analyse our present reality which is different from his, although not as different as the *afficionados* of the idea of "globalisation" think.

The topic we have been asked to say a few words on is "Crisis, Class Composition and the International Perspectives for Class Struggle".

The Class Struggle in Britain and Italy

Other comrades will speak about the current revival of the struggle of workers in Germany. I was asked to add a few words about the situation of the working class in Britain and Italy. There is no question that the capitalist class is attempting to go further in cutting real wages, pension rights etc. as well as increasing working hours and there is no doubt that sections of the class have responded bitterly. In July this year, our comrades wrote of the strikes on the Milan trams and at the FIAT Melfi factory. On the trams starting in December 2003, the workers had actually gone outside the control of the three main union federations and taken control of the struggle themselves, holding mass assemblies at different depots without union officials and ignoring the legal framework for controlling industrial struggle. At Melfi there was an all-out struggle for three weeks, with blockades, strikes and pickets all featuring. Both strikes gave the same

lesson that, however resourceful and militant any one group of workers are, fighting as an isolated section of the class is something which the capitalists can quite happily deal with. The Milan tramworkers, for example, had their strike settled by a national agreement made by the unions for all transport workers giving them an even worse contract than they had had before. However, this has not stopped the burgeoning of strikes throughout Europe. Our magazine in Britain, *Revolutionary Perspectives*, has, this year, reported on different strikes in Britain in every issue. This is the first time we have been able to do this for years. Some of these strikes have been won, such as the steel erectors on the new Wembley Stadium who took on one of the unions which was actually recruiting scab labour against them and they won. In most of the others, the unions have done their usual game of running ahead to try to contain the strike (a bit like the strike at Opel). We have also, in an article entitled "The Spectre of Class Struggle Still Haunts Europe" detailed strikes in Portugal, France, Austria, and even more in Italy amongst bus, rail and airline workers. In our last issue we reported on the German strikes against Agenda 2010.

In Britain the re-appearance of so many strikes has been extremely encouraging for several reasons. In terms of the European working class Britain was hit the hardest and earliest by the capitalist need to restructure in the face of the crisis. The bourgeoisie had for a decade tried to make the British working class pay for the crisis by trying to use inflation to cut real wages. But the working class fought this at every turn and it was only after the IMF stepped in and advised even deeper cuts in 1977 that the British ruling class began to cut jobs. The Labour Government cut one million jobs between 1977-9, tripling unemployment and provoking a massive strike wave in the winter of 1978-9, the so-called "winter of

discontent". The Conservative Party then came to power in 1979 and realised that they needed to carry forward the Labour job-cutting programme but that it had to be done section by section. They picked on steel in 1980 and after a 13 week strike the steelworkers discovered that fighting for a job is a lot harder than fighting for a wage. Within weeks of the end of that strike, British Steel had been decimated and a process of slimming down (then privatisation) had begun. By now Thatcher had set her sights on the miners but after a failed attempt to attack them in 1981 the Tory Government decided to devise the so-called Ridley Plan to prepare for a long strike. It was perhaps the most complete military strategy adopted by any government in the class war. Power stations were converted to oil, coal stocks were built up to record levels, coal imports from Poland, etc., were increased, the transport of coal was taken away from railways and put in the hands of small private haulage companies. Then the provocation of job layoffs was announced in February when most of the winter was passed. Against this cunning the working class were lions led by donkeys. The slogan of the miners' union "Coal not Dole" was a disaster since it immediately isolated the struggle. Too many miners who showed individual initiative did so for the union and not for the overall struggle. There were several moments when the dock workers or the steel workers might have swung the balance but each time the unions argued that it was a trade dispute. The fact was that it was struggle for the whole working class and we would contend not just in Britain but throughout the capitalist central economies. The miners' strike lasted 13 months but the defeat was extremely hard felt. Within 5 years, 1 million mining jobs were lost and by then a whole lot more in many other sectors, including shipyards and printing.

Crisis and Restructuring

So what is our framework for understanding all that has passed over the last twenty or thirty years? First, the whole thing is driven by the economic crisis. The crisis arrived at the end of the 1960's/beginning of the 1970's. The crisis was not a product of the rise in oil prices, the Vietnam War, the saturation of markets or even the devaluation of the US dollar. On the contrary these phenomenon are to be explained by the accumulation problems caused by the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This happens in cycles under capitalism and, in the imperialist epoch, we have identified three of these. The previous two ended in the First and Second World Wars but the current crisis has not yet been resolved. Due to the high level of national and international state management of the world economy tendencies which would have led to a more rapid collapse (such as was visited on the static and more statified Soviet economy) have been attenuated. Instead, we have had a thirty year crisis of virtual stagnation in which the various counter-tendencies have been fully operational. They have so far arrested a further decline in the rate of profit (and in some sectors have even increased it but none of this has been sufficient to open up a new round of accumulation. Instead capitalism has resorted to measures and developments at various levels to try to break this crisis of profitability. At their most fundamental an increase in the exploitation, in both absolute and relative terms, of the global proletariat is the main effect of their strategies and policies.

The main ways which the capitalists have resisted the crisis have been

1. to step up the sophistication of financial controls at an international level
2. to profoundly restructure the productive apparatus (including the microprocessor revolution) so that dramatic increases in productivity (relative exploitation) can be achieved
3. the consequent abolition of many jobs in the heavy industrial sectors as well as in other areas superseded by new technology (e.g. printing)

4. the squeezing on earnings (both direct and indirect) and working conditions.

I haven't time to deal in detail with all these aspects but let's look briefly at restructuring.

The restructuring of plant represented the first concrete outcome of the microprocessor revolution. By itself, this did not in any way effectively combat the fall in the rate of profit. Then came immediately the modification of the organisation of work, in line with the different hierarchies and tasks involved with the new labour processes using the new instruments of production. This too, however, wasn't enough to effectively arrest the fall in the rate of profit, that is, to bring the average rate of profit back to the levels prior to 1970. This led to the third phase of anti-crisis measures, especially a direct attack on wages.

So-called neo-liberal policies, launched by the bourgeoisie in place of Keynesianism and the direct management by the state of production — both considered by the very same bourgeoisie to be responsible for the crisis and the fall in its profit rates — imply an attack on indirect wages, where they exist, distributed in the form of pensions, schools and health, and an attack of direct salaries, everywhere, and in forms which prefigure a return to *Manchesterism* (substantially an increase in absolute surplus-value, where the recovery of relative surplus-value does not suffice). This is, perhaps, one of the most significant aspects of the seriousness of the present crisis in the cycle of accumulation. It is the latest phase of these attempts to reduce variable capital still further which are at the heart of the current strikes across Europe over the last eighteen months or so. For example, only this week in Britain, 200 000 low-paid civil servants have voted to strike against cuts in their pensions.

Under the weight of the crisis it is possible to see that the proletarianisation of the population has actually increased rather than decreased. In some industries the separation of managerial from operation functions has ended as it is all done by the same person on a computer usually paid a clerk's wages. Previous "professional" jobs are increasingly being undermined by less qualified people being given the same responsibilities without the same

reward. This is happening largely at the heart of the system but also at the periphery. In the metropolitan areas like Europe the increase in extraction of surplus value tends to be relative (i.e. fewer wage earners produce an ever greater value of commodities). In the periphery absolute exploitation is unbelievable with workers working fourteen hours a day for starvation wages. In China 120 million ex-peasants alone act as a reserve army of unemployed to ensure that labour is both cheap, expendable and instantly replaceable. In places like this (and other areas where labour is cheap) the traditional Fordist organisation still largely prevails. The main difference between the proletarian who lives in the centre compared with those in what we can only describe as the "non-developing world" is that the history of struggle has forced the capitalists in the past to erect a social system which offers some palliatives in the form of a welfare state to prevent anger becoming desperation. The attempts to dismantle the welfare state (and the tax cutting for the middle classes and bourgeoisie) have so far only partially succeeded since not only have the capitalists got to remember its uses in calming discontent but they also need to keep some part of the working class "consuming" the largely useless commodities the system spews out.

A Communist Perspective

Marxists try to understand the present trends but we are not crystal ball gazers. In fact the history of confident predictions made by Marx and Lenin is not an auspicious one! What instead we have to do is from the present situation work out what the perspectives for our activity as the most conscious part of the revolutionary working class is.

The proletariat finds itself today in an extremely difficult situation which requires:

- 1 the recovery of the consciousness of itself as a class distinct both from the bourgeoisie and also a generic and interclassist citizenry or "civil society", by recognising its new composition;
- 2 recovery of the belief in its own strength — which remains intact because it remains the sole source of surplus value and thus of the capitalists' profits;

3 the finding of new forms of organisation for its own defence, as an absolutely necessary and preparatory part of the revolutionary counter-attack.

The consciousness of itself as a class is something distinct from full class consciousness, although it is a presupposition for it. The self-recognition of the workers as a class distinct from the bourgeoisie and with interests opposed to those of the bourgeoisie is the product, obviously not in a mechanical way, of the very conditions in the ambit of the relations of production, and it is the subjective element which leads to collective struggles of a defensive nature and/or in pursuit of demands.

It was something which was often present among the proletariat of many metropolitan countries throughout the '70's and the majority of the '80's. But today it is dramatically lacking, and it was lost following the dramatic events and the ideological framework mentioned above, and it must be recovered as an indispensable condition for the proletariat's recovery of belief in its own strength.

Years of bourgeois ideological campaigns on the end of class struggle, the end of classes themselves, on the basis of the USSR's implosion, have had a profound effect which requires time to be overcome. And it is clear to Marxists that the role of communist vanguards in returning to the class its sense of itself and its strength is anything but irrelevant.

It is in the materiality of the relations of production and, more generally, of social relations, that the class can return to manifesting itself as such, as we are shown by a few leaps in class struggle, which, despite being isolated and episodic, occur even in today's situation (Argentina).

In contrast, it is the task of revolutionary vanguards to identify moments of revival and insert the ideas and programme of the revolutionary proletariat, gathering around themselves — on the basis of these ideas and this programme — the organised and organising force capable of guiding the class to the revolution, which is the only real instrument for the acquisition of full class consciousness.

Although the working class in struggle will produce its own embryonic organs of struggle these will tend to rise and

fall with each struggle. The task of the Party is different. Besides its work of clarification, education and propaganda it has to be linked to the actual class struggle going on before it. In this sense it has to find ways of keeping groups of workers together and carry the memory of one phase of struggle into the next. In the old Fordist organisation where the workforce numbered 20 000 in a factory our answer was factory groups. These were made up of party members and non-party members who agreed on the aim of keeping the struggle in the hands of the workers themselves and out of the hands of the union apparatus. Once the struggle was over attempts were made to keep each worker involved via discussion, paper sales, etc. However, the fact that many production units are smaller (though many workers still live in the same areas) means that we also need to adapt the framework to both current reality and the perspective that struggles have to be generalised by developing territorial groups.

The different distribution of the class in its places of work radically changes the ways in which new waves of struggle can appear. As well as coming up against the unions as the first bastion of counter-revolution which must be fought and overcome, the proletariat can no longer count on launching its struggles from the great industrial concentrations especially in the capitalist metropolises, which could extend to all the productive units of a sector or of the whole of production, as always happened in the history of the workers' movement. The sole remaining possibility is that the start of the reorganisation of struggle commences from the aggregation of forces on a territorial basis.

In some ways they will be the same as the old factory groups but they will link workers in single neighbourhoods around either issues or the possibilities of a common struggle.

Communist factory and territorial groups will be characterised by:

1 the denunciation of all the expressions and tendencies of the pseudo-left of bourgeois ideology (including trades unionism), which are always present among the working masses, opposing them with the positions elaborated and defended by the Party, as it is confronted by the reality of events;

2 the critical clarification of all those objectives of the struggle which can only be realised through the revolutionary conquest of political power and the overthrowing of the capitalist system;

3 pressure for proletarian solidarity and for the unification of struggle on the international plane; unity with immigrant proletarians of every country, against the exploitation and unemployment which dominates the world market in labour-power.

Obviously these organisations would also recruit more militants to the party but only after they had actually embraced its programme. At the same time we would still be extending the membership of these groups, especially in periods of intensified struggle in order to bring the communist programme closer to the daily struggle of the working class. Capitalism can go on forever unless we as a class achieve this and we don't think it is the task of communist to simply preach but also to act.

Conclusion

I said at the beginning that the reappearance of so many strikes is encouraging for many reasons. I will finish on this. Recently we have made contact with young workers in the anti-war movement and elsewhere who have been attracted by some of what the Communist Left has to say. What has been the stumbling block for them has been the fact that they are listening to the siren calls of those who are once again arguing that the working class no longer exists. When you look around you realise that most of our current members at least remember the miners' strike whilst many actually took part in the attempts to widen it. Some of us go even further back to the May '68 strikes, the "Hot Autumn" of 1969 in Italy or the miners' and electricians' strikes of 1972 and 1974. To a new young generation the lies of bourgeois commentators, so-called autonomists, the "no globals" that class no longer matters or no longer exists have some substance if there is no visible action of the class to relate to.

Marx stated two important things about strikes. Without them the working class is reduced to a set of degraded wretches and even with them they are not the automatic and

Continued on next page

The German Manifestation of the Crisis

One crisis, minor variations

Across the world, the *leitmotiv* is capitalist crisis, played out on the same instruments: on the theme of increased exploitation, we hear the rhythm of increased work-rates and the diminution of direct and indirect wages, and the contrapuntal theme of capital's inability to mobilise the productive forces, unemployment, underemployment and redundancy. Here, the theme may be stressed, and there, the counterpoint, but the music is the same everywhere.

In particular, the bourgeoisie in the capitalist metropolises has either cut indirect and deferred wages to the bone or is in the process of doing so. That is, unemployment benefits are reduced to the level of aid for the poor, and then both are further cut, education is made to more and more reflect the needs of capitalism, rather than the development of the child, and health is paid for by the patients and important corners are cut (e.g., in Britain, the privatisation of cleaning services allowing hospitals

to become breeding places for disease in a way not seen since Victorian times). On top of this, the theft of our pensions has become commonplace.

The German variation

For those that explain the differing economic performance of various countries by their different national characteristics, the German example can only be a mystery. Suddenly — in historical terms — the Germans have gone from being efficient and hard-working to being lazy. The odd thing is that this happened almost simultaneously with the re-unification of the country.

The latest figures show the extent of this apparent and bizarre transformation in the German "national character". Over the last three months, "laziness" has increased to the extent that unemployment has gone up 17 000, and is expected to reach 5 million at some point this year. In what was the old West Germany, the rate is 8.7% of the "economically active", while in the East it is over twice that figure, at 18.5%, and even reaches 28.7% in one *Land*, Saxony-Anhalt¹.

The German government are among those that believe (or pretend to believe) in this transformation. In their latest legislation, Hartz IV, they cut benefits for the long-term unemployed and force workers to take unsuitable (and low-paid) jobs to get them off the dole.

For Marxists, however, there is no mystery. With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the technologically advanced Western German economy acquired regions which had been held back by being attached to the economically weaker Eastern Bloc. Although the West German bourgeoisie was entirely aware of at least some of the economic disadvantages of reunification, acquisition of the East increased the German state's importance as an imperialist power, which, in the long-term improves its ability to obtain

economic advantage by extra-economic means.

If unification had happened when capitalism was in the upward phase of its accumulation cycle, there would have been minor economic problems and major economic advantages, as capital would have been generated to invest in the transformation of the East, and the general expansion of the German economy within its new boundaries.

Instead, capitalism is, and has been for over 30 years, in its phase of crisis. Today, economic expansion at a level sufficient to overcome structural problems *is* possible, but only on the basis of low wages and high rates of exploitation, as the Chinese example shows. Unluckily for the bourgeoisie in the metropolitan countries, Chinese wages are the result of the unpleasant situation that the Chinese proletariat finds itself in, caused primarily by mass unemployment resulting from the expulsion of masses of people from the agricultural sector. (See the article on China in this edition.) The European bourgeoisie is doing its best to reduce wages here even though it cannot hope to bring them down to Chinese levels.

With Hartz IV, the German bourgeoisie is simultaneously blaming the unemployed for the lack of employment, and taking material steps to cut the social wage, push down direct wages and increase exploitation.

As a further step to increase exploitation, the bosses' organisation (BDI — *Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie*) and the Christian Democrat opposition are calling for a return to the 40-hour week, and the IG Metall union has signed several local agreements for longer working weeks and lower wages.²

But, no matter how low wages are pushed, or how high the rate of exploitation becomes, the rate of profit will continue to fall, as it is determined by capitalist competition, which will continue on the basis of the new wage-rates and rate of exploitation. This fall in the rate of profit will, in its turn,

Crisis, Class Composition and the International Perspectives for Class Struggle

Continued from previous page

spontaneous launch pad for a new class consciousness. However, without them there can be no widespread development of class consciousness, there can be no field for today's communist to work in and no hope of a mass political movement of the future which is the only real anti-capitalist movement. In that sense the recent strikes in Europe are overdue evidence that the working class is still with us and represents the best hope for humanity.

Jock

demand further attacks on the working class. The only alternative for a national section of the capitalist class is to deflect the consequences of the crisis onto another national section of the capitalist class³, and following this alternative eventually leads to war. But war, too, is an attack on the working class, as the vast majority of casualties, on the frontline and at home, are workers, and it is workers who also suffer from wartime increases in... the rate of exploitation.

The proletarian response

Even in China, where the proletariat is in a difficult situation, workers are fighting back, as all workers have to, if they are not to be totally immiserated.

German workers, too, are resisting the attempts of capitalism to make them pay for its crisis. Not only have there been mass demonstrations against Hartz IV, there have also been struggles against the extension of working hours, disguised and open wage-cuts and worsening of working conditions at Chrysler-Daimler, Opel and elsewhere. Workers at the General Motors' subsidiary, Opel, in Bochum, struck in November against their employer's plan to cut 12 000 jobs. Despite the participation in a day of mass meetings of other General Motors workers across Europe and in Brazil, and the

promise by the Brazilian workers that they would not increase production to meet any shortfall in output at Bochum, in December the unions signed an agreement with the bosses phasing in... the loss of 12 000 jobs⁴.

Despite the fact that at Chrysler-Daimler, too, the bosses got virtually they wanted, thanks to the unions losing at the negotiating table what solidarity had gained, the workers prevented the bosses from gaining the propaganda victory they had sought by taking on the third largest group of German workers, because the workers at least won a formal victory (see RP 33).

But defensive struggles like these must be seen as the first step in a revival of class consciousness. The unions will always be able to impose a resolution of struggle which is to the benefit of the capitalist class to the extent that the working class is unable to recognise them as agents of capital in their midst. Moreover, there are objective limits within which capital can allow workers to be paid, and these limits are becoming tighter and tighter to the point where they are no longer compatible with workers living any kind of decent life. In the future, they will be incompatible with the reproduction of labour itself (as they are already in many parts of the world).

If the capitalist "solution" of a war intensive and extensive enough to

devalue capital to the point where a new cycle of accumulation can be launched, does not intervene, then the working class will be forced to challenge the very existence of capital itself. It is better this is done sooner rather than later.

To equip itself for this challenge, and the struggles before and during it, the working class needs to give itself a party, to allow it to carry the lessons from one incident of struggle to another, to wage the theoretical war against the ideologies of the bourgeoisie and to aid its organisational and, eventually, military, struggles.

It is to this end that we are pleased to welcome the steps towards the consolidation of the organisation of left communists in Germany, as reported elsewhere in this issue.

Notes

1 *Financial Times*, 5th January 2005

2 *Financial Times*, 9th November 2005

3 Today, capitalist competition on the national level itself has resulted in a tendency to force the capitalist class to partially, and in a contradictory fashion, overcome the national level and unite in blocs. But, in terms of imperialist conflict and insofar as they consolidate themselves, these blocs tend to play the same role as nations did before. In short, imperialist conflict is not abolished but raised to a still higher level

4 <http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2004/12/feature/de0412202f.html>, part of the European Industrial Relations Observatory website

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Correspondence: Communist Consciousness and Democracy

Introduction

We are publishing below an edited version of a letter which was sent to the Socialist Party (SP) by one of our contacts who was previously a member of the SP of Great Britain, a splinter of the SP. The letter, which the SP never answered, raises key issues, namely the development of communist consciousness amongst the working class and the nature of bourgeois democracy. Failure to understand these issues prevents the SP from understanding how a transition from capitalism to

communism can be achieved. By refusing to recognise the materialist basis for consciousness the SP inevitably founds consciousness on an idealist base. This allows it to reach the conclusion that the majority of the working class can achieve communist consciousness while the material basis of capitalist society remains in place. The separation of consciousness from social existence is the premise on which the utopian politics of the SP rest. In future social upheavals in which the working class comes to challenge the existence of capitalist society the politics of the SP could play a reactionary role.

Letter to Socialist Party

I wish to make some comments pertaining to Mr. S. Trott's article on democracy, and to the Editor's reply to a correspondent in the *Socialist Standard* of November 2004.

Mr. Trott does well in exposing the fact that capitalist democracy is a sham, however whilst Mr. Trott's article is generally good, he seems to be being inconsistent. He tells us: "Working people with an understanding of socialism can utilise their vote to signify that the overwhelming majority demand change and to bring about social revolution" yet he also says "we need to use these rights to organise and spread socialist understanding so a socialist majority can capture political power". The first statement states that we can use political democracy, yet the second statement says that we cannot get Socialism without using political democracy. The Editors take up the second position saying that the election of a majority of socialist delegates to Parliament will deprive the capitalist class of their political power.

How can the control of Parliament itself deprive the capitalist class of their political power? You say that it will give the working class the control of the armed forces, yet in the *Socialist Standard* of February 1929 you tell us that the army can revolt against the Government, although you tell us this won't happen to a socialist government because a majority of workers will be socialists. This does not however detract from the fact that Parliament does not control the armed forces. Men act upon their ideas, and as Professor S. Coleman, whilst he was a representative of your group, argued, "political power is ultimately based on

consent" (*World Revolution* 20), we do not need to use the capitalist state machinery to achieve Socialism. In fact, in contrast to your view, the SPGB in 1942, argued: "We hold the same view as Marx as to the necessity of the workers gaining control of the machinery of Government before they can establish Socialism. We also hold Marx's view that in the industrially advanced countries, the vote will give that control" (*Questions of the Day*, p78). If the vote will only give us that control in the advanced countries, then that presupposes that we don't need the vote to give us that control. The question of how to get Socialism is based upon the developing of communist consciousness.

With regards to communist consciousness, Marxism demonstrates that you have to be wrong when you say a majority of workers can use their vote to (a) capture political power and (b) express their socialist viewpoint, precisely because socialist consciousness will develop in the process of the working class capturing power. By the time the majority of workers have socialist consciousness; in fact long before it, the working class will have smashed the capitalist state. *The Road to Socialism* (1987) published by Guildford Branch referred to proletarian uprisings that would occur before the majority of workers were socialists. Marx says: "for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness...the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution" (*German Ideology*, p69). What this demonstrates is that mass communist consciousness will develop in the revolutionary process. The majority of revolutionaries will not

make a political revolution: the political revolution will make a revolutionary majority. As the SPGB said in their 1911 pamphlet on religion: "In contrast with the Idealist metaphysics of the Churches, the Socialist movement is materialist in philosophy, object, and method [therefore] the Socialist knows that a paradise people could only be born of paradise conditions". (....)

With regards to political rights, Mr. Trott tells us: "We need to use these rights to organise and spread socialist understanding". (.....) This idealist position, saying that socialist consciousness emanates primarily from socialist propaganda, and not from the contradiction between the relations and forces of production is anti Marxist as Marx clearly says: "our conception of history...accordingly comes to the conclusion that all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism" (*German Ideology*, p28). (.....)

In deviating from the revolutionary position of no compromise, in telling workers that they should vote MP's into Parliament when Parliament will have been smashed by the working class long before we will be able to get a majority of MP's, and in refusing to accept that only through a bloody civil war (and it will be a bloody civil war, as the materialist conception dictates), will a majority of workers develop socialist consciousness, your group is disarming the working class, and thus it is playing a reactionary role. I am ashamed that I ever considered myself to have supported your conception of the Socialist case.

Yours for Socialism, RC

Tsunami — the Disaster is Capitalism

The numbers of dead from the horrific tsunami which hit Asia on 26th December will never fully be known. Recent estimates put the total numbers so far at 226 000, but this is still rising and in some regions the numbers are so vast the authorities have stopped counting. At the very least, 40 000 lost their lives in Sri Lanka, 166 000 in Indonesia and 5300 in Thailand with countless thousands still missing and unaccounted for.

Naturally as with all disasters under capitalism, the poorest sections of the population have been hit worst. Before the tsunami struck, Sri Lanka for example, had a shortage of one million dwellings. Those who eked out a living on the coastlines and lived in squatter shacks stood no chance.

It is no coincidence, either, that the areas worst affected were those where there are civil wars. The war in Indonesia between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) has been going on for twenty-five years during which time 10 000 people have been killed. Human rights abuses are rife. In Aceh, where at least 35 000 children have now lost one or more parents, the abuses of human rights reached such a scale that the Indonesian government banned all foreigners and journalists from visiting and declared martial law in the province in May 2003. Aceh is the site of the largest natural gas fields run by Exxon Mobil and fiercely protected by the Indonesian authorities. The same military who now control the relief effort killed 200 000 in the wars in Timor and between 400 000 to one million in the war in 1965-7, when the Indonesian government was consolidating power. Although a ceasefire was declared immediately after the tsunami hit, there are signs now that the government is taking advantage of the disaster to tighten its grip on the region, blaming Gam separatists for opening fire on soldiers and stealing aid, all of which has been refuted by witnesses and aid workers.

In Sri Lanka where the government has been at war with Tamil Tigers, Kofi

Annan was prevented from visiting rebel-held areas on the north and east of the country. The Tamil Tigers say little aid has been sent to the areas they control. In both cases aid is being used as a weapon of war.

That such a tragic humanitarian disaster could be exploited by the bourgeoisie is horrific but not surprising. The US, being the largest power on the planet, is best placed to make capital from the disaster. As elsewhere, the US is using aid to its own advantage. Leaving aside the fact that, like Tony Blair, Bush was on holiday when the disaster struck and made no attempt to act for several days until forced to, the US has done everything it can to turn the situation to its advantage, primarily as a propaganda coup. As they sent aid to the region, Colin Powell noted that this was a moment "to win the Muslim world" and "change the battered image of the US". He visited Aceh with Jeb Bush in the crucial days following the disaster. The airport had to be closed down for security during their visit. All incoming flights were halted for two hours and aid was brought to a standstill. As other politicians and VIP's flocked to the area to appear on TV "helping" the relief effort, authorities in Banda Aceh appealed for them to stay away since it disrupted the vital distribution of aid.

In the days following the disaster the US also saw a way to discredit the UN, thorn in its side over the Iraq war, by announcing plans to override the UN's co-ordination of the relief effort and run it instead with a "core group" of countries headed by the US. This plan lasted eight days before it collapsed under its own disorganisation.

But the main benefit for the US will come

through aid. It wants to use the disaster to spread its troops through the region. It already has troops based throughout the area supporting governments guilty of human rights abuses such as the Indonesian and Sri Lankan regimes, but it wants a stronger foothold. At the same time as neoconservatives such as Wolfowitz in Washington are working hard to lift human rights sanctions imposed on the Indonesian military regime, (it is interesting to note that, in his visit to Banda Aceh, Powell made no real effort to restore the ceasefire), the US has stated that the troops it has sent will stay in the region for six months, though this could obviously turn into something more permanent. Part of its aid to Thailand is a return of troops to the Utapao Royal Thai Naval Air Force south of Bangkok.

In the days following the disaster, something of a Dutch auction occurred with governments around the world out bidding each other in the amount of aid they pledged to the region. When the aid promised is compared with the amounts spent on the war in Iraq it pales into insignificance. As Patrick Leahy, a US senator said "We spend \$35 millions before breakfast in Iraq". He's right. So far the US has spent \$148 billions on the war in Iraq; the UK has spent \$11.5 billions. As it stands, the total money pledged to the tsunami relief effort by the US is the equivalent of one and a half days spending in Iraq.

In any case most of the aid will be tied. 90% of food aid is bought from the

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donor countries and 50% of that comes from the US. Much of it is also given as contracts for domestic corporations or in return for the implementation of free market policies which will favour the richer nations. As a UN official said, "A lot of the money will be swallowed up by the military, or will have been diverted from existing loans". There is no guarantee, of course, that the governments will meet their generous promises with hard cash. The Earthquake in Iran in December 2003 saw £500 millions promised. One year on, only £9 million arrived. £230 millions were pledged to Mozambique after the floods four years ago, only half was delivered. Much of this "new" money will be diverted from budgets for the Sudan and the Congo where an horrendous humanitarian crisis is still going on.

It is a rule of imperialism that the richest countries skim billions from the poorest. Debt repayments are a manifestation of this. The promises to suspend the interest on debts to the richest countries (members of the Paris Club) represent another double-edged sword. In total the affected countries owe \$272 billions. Indonesia, worst affected by the disaster, pays 80% of its GDP in debt repayments. It has said it needs donations not just a debt freeze. Thailand however has stated it does not want debt repayments to be suspended because it is afraid it will affect its future credit rating. There is little doubt that even if the suspension of interest was implemented worse

repayment terms could be instituted once the suspension was lifted.

At the same time as money was being pledged, the quota system that gave textile exports from Sri Lanka and the Maldives special access to Europe and the US ended. It is estimated that Sri Lanka will now lose 100,000 jobs. In some areas of India and Sri Lanka there are reports people will be displaced from coastal regions as plans for redevelopment include the building of hotels along the coast instead of rebuilding fishing villages.

The all-important tourist industry is taking precedence in many areas. Undoubtedly this disaster received more coverage than most because tourists were involved, and their loss of life was given greater coverage than that of 'locals'. The promotion of the tourist industry has meant the relentless destruction of mangroves and coral reefs, both of which are natural protective barriers. In any case there can be few sights more sickening than that witnessed in Thailand, where locals struggled to pull bodies out of the sea and pile them on one end of the beach whilst tourists on the other covered themselves in sun cream.

The region lacked an early warning system, rejected last year as too expensive. Smith Thammasaroj, head of Thailand's meteorological office warned in 1998 of the possibility of a tsunami in the region. He was discredited and sacked for scare mongering and causing potential damage to the tourist industry. Mr Thammasaroj says

the US knew of the tsunami because of its Hawaii-based Pacific tsunami warning centre. It had an hour to warn Indonesia, two hours to warn Thailand and Sri Lanka and six hours to warn Africa. It warned no-one, claiming it didn't have telephone numbers and that it couldn't determine the size of the waves and didn't want to harm the tourism industry. In reality communications infrastructure in the region is poor, most people are not connected to the global communications grid since there is no commercial interest in it.

Under capitalism everything has a price. The sale of children orphaned by the disaster is only one example amongst many why this is a sick system which desperately needs to be replaced. Indonesian authorities were forced to post police guards in orphanages after child traffickers tried to snatch children in Aceh. Aceh is close to the city port of Medan and the island of Batam, both well-known transit points for gangs shipping children into slavery and the sex-trade. It is estimated that one million children are currently in slavery around the world.

This won't be the last major disaster, natural or otherwise, but the amount of people who lost their lives and the numbers who will suffer as a result show, if proof were needed, that as long as we live under capitalism we are living in the Dark Ages.

RT

The CWO's Basic Positions

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx): Communism.

2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is

called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.

3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was

set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve — the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

Internationalist Communist

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